

# THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL

THE LEARNING FORWARD JOURNAL

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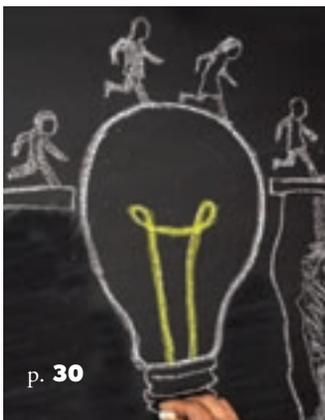
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*By Jill Harrison Berg*

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*By Julie A. Jacobi, Sarah E. Stults, Rachel Shefner, Karin E. Lange, Nayantara S. Abraham, and Megan Deiger*

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*By Elizabeth Leisy Stosich, Michelle L. Forman, and Candice Bocala*

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The authors developed an internal coherence approach to help instructional leadership teams focus their work and align resources in support of a common vision for student success.

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*By Beth Bishop, Amy Breitenbucher, Andrea Lang Sims, Stephanie Montez, and Christel Swinehart-Arbogast*

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*By Andy Hargreaves and Michael T. O'Connor*

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*By Jeremy Avins, Nathan Huttner, and Sherrill C. Miller*

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*By Dennis Sparks*

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## I SAY

### Joe Doctor

Chief operating officer,  
National Board  
for Professional Teaching  
Standards



"Teachers and teaching matter. Teaching quality is the biggest in-school driver of student learning. Teachers change students' lives! Yet we know that our system isn't designed to deliver great teaching at scale. Once we recognize this, we have to think of all of the children we know and ask: Which student doesn't deserve to be taught by an accomplished, Board-certified teacher?"

"If we are bold, we can use state licensure and professional certification as building blocks to elevate the profession. Other professions, such as medicine, engineering, and nursing, have demonstrated how. Let's create a strong teaching career continuum that leads from preparation to accomplished practice and then to a variety of leadership roles within the profession."

**Source:** In-person convening of CCSSO's Certification and Licensure Collective.

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## HERE WE GO

Suzanne Bouffard

# WHAT DOES REAL COLLABORATION LOOK LIKE? WE'VE GOT STORIES

**H**ave you ever been part of a team that doesn't do any actual teamwork? I can recall plenty of examples from my professional and personal lives, like a staff team whose meetings were canceled too often to make progress and a dance company that was so riddled with competition members wouldn't help one another. (I left both long ago.)

Education teams, too, can suffer from a lack of true collaboration. Many teachers have little opportunity to collaborate within and across schools, nonteaching staff have few chances to connect in meaningful ways with teachers, and administrators don't always get as much time to connect directly with staff as they wish.

Yet we know that collaboration is essential for effective professional learning and great teaching. That's why Learning Forward advocated for its inclusion as a core principle in the definition of professional development within the Every Student Succeeds Act in the United States, and why Learning Communities is one of the Standards for Professional Learning.

So what does *real* collaboration look like? How do we get beyond surface-level attempts at collaboration so that education professionals are truly learning from and supporting one another? How do we achieve the more critical aspects of the Learning Communities standard to foster collective responsibility?

This issue is dedicated to answering those questions. Authors write about overcoming common challenges to PLCs, nurturing teacher leadership, developing authentic partnerships between school districts and universities, bringing school counselors into the fold of professional learning, and more.

Learning Forward members have an inspiring diversity of roles and responsibilities, so they are poised to engage in real collaboration and make high-quality professional learning a priority throughout their districts, schools, and organizations. To illustrate this potential, this issue's "At a Glance" feature (p. 80) highlights the many different professional titles held by Learning Forward members. A quick look at the word cloud we created shows that professional learning crosses departmental boundaries. Our members include directors, chiefs, deputies, leaders, teachers, coaches, department chairs, board members, and many others. Imagine the learning and teaching accomplished when these learning professionals work together.

Relationships are, of course, a central part of collaboration. Throughout this issue, you'll read about stories of life-changing relationships within and across districts. These include a Member Spotlight feature (p. 14) about two Learning Forward Academy members who became vital career resources for one another and lifelong friends. We have been inspired by their story, and we know many of you have your own influential collaboration stories. We invite you to share them with us on social media and by email so we can learn from you.

This issue introduces a new feature. In celebration of Learning Forward's 50th anniversary year, we're including classic articles from our archives (see p. 70). With these articles, we revisit timeless advice and lasting wisdom from Learning Forward leaders and authors, along with commentary from current staff about how those articles shaped their work and the field. Whether you read "The Final 2%" by Dennis Sparks when it was first published in 2005 or are reading it here for the first time, we want to know how these words influence you. Share your thoughts with us on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. ■



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# THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL

THE LEARNING FORWARD JOURNAL

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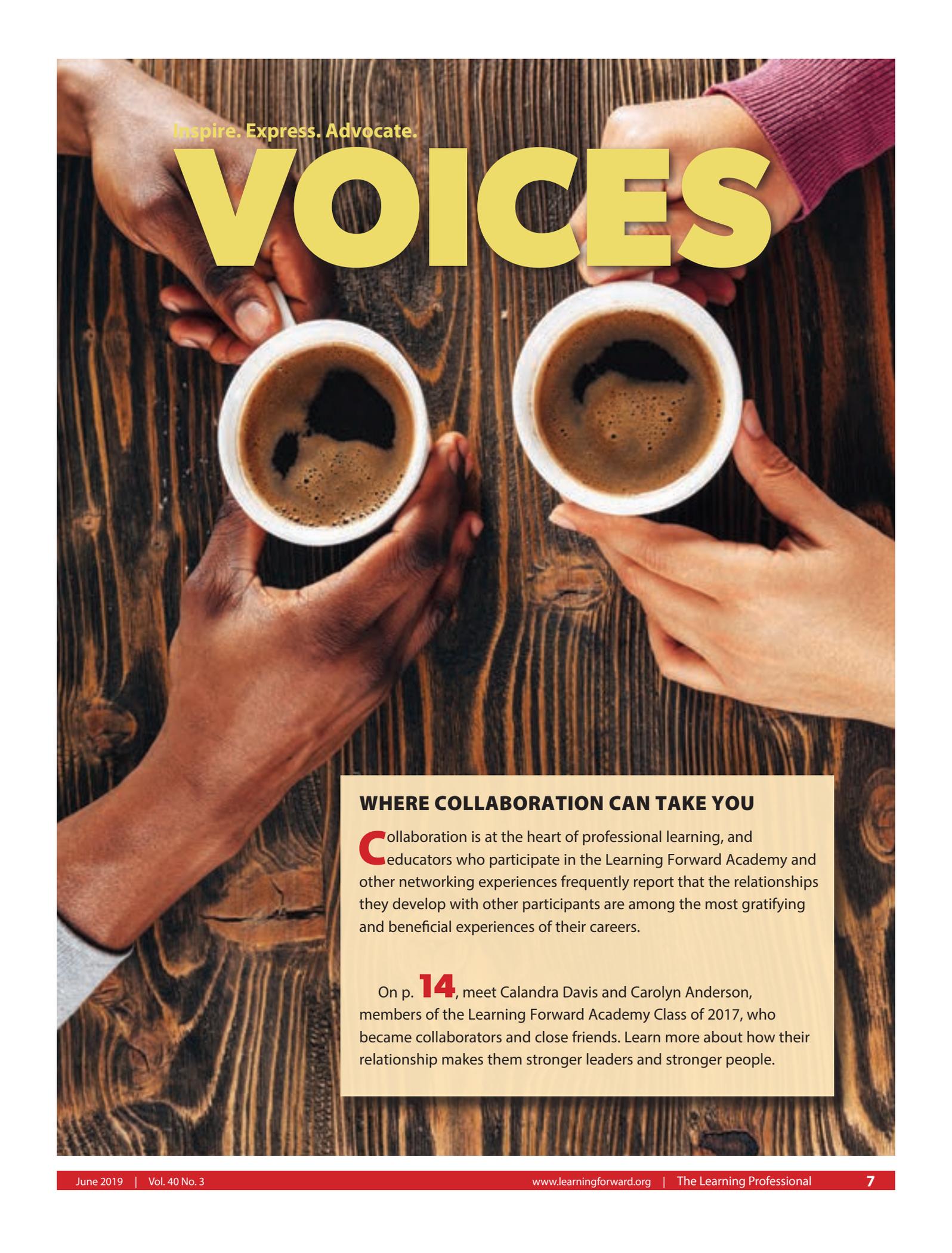
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# VOICES

## WHERE COLLABORATION CAN TAKE YOU

**C**ollaboration is at the heart of professional learning, and educators who participate in the Learning Forward Academy and other networking experiences frequently report that the relationships they develop with other participants are among the most gratifying and beneficial experiences of their careers.

On p. **14**, meet Calandra Davis and Carolyn Anderson, members of the Learning Forward Academy Class of 2017, who became collaborators and close friends. Learn more about how their relationship makes them stronger leaders and stronger people.



## CALL TO ACTION

Denise Glyn Borders

# BUILD BRIDGES, PUSH BOUNDARIES, AND MAKE CONNECTIONS

**W**hen I had my first teaching experiences many years ago during my undergraduate education in Minnesota, I had no sense yet of the kinds of support an educator deserves and requires. From where I sit today, I'm proud to lead an organization dedicated to ensuring every educator has access to the most effective support possible. As I start my tenure as Learning Forward's executive director, I want to share a bit about who I am as an educator.

My varied career started with teaching and always kept me learning.

Something I share with many Learning Forward members is a career pathway that explores education from many seats, from teacher to district leader to positions in research, government, for-profit, and nonprofit organizations.

I have taught at every grade level, from prekindergarten through graduate-level university. Beginning as a college student and through graduate school, I was eager to take everything I was learning and see it in practice. Thus began my compulsion to see research find its way into practice to have a real impact in schools.

After undergrad, I taught in Ithaca, New York — not in the schools serving Cornell University but in downtown Ithaca and rural Appalachia. I saw as a teacher what kids and families really need beyond education, though I had learned that lesson at home as child.

Growing up, I watched my parents in Omaha, Nebraska, do whatever it took so my sister and I could attend decent schools, moving us across town and working nonstop to make a good education possible. I also saw how communities contribute to education, with families such as the Buffetts investing in children's futures, so that students from poor families — students like me — could receive scholarships to go to college. From my earliest days as a student, I knew how fortunate I was to have the opportunity to learn, and I've never wanted to stop.

### **I believe in giving educators what they need to do their jobs well.**

At the same time I was in graduate school at Teachers College at Columbia, I was working in schools in New York City — in Harlem, in the Bronx, at the Manhattan Country Day School — broadening my understanding of the diversity of children's learning needs and experiences. I moved to a business environment for 10 years at CTB/McGraw-Hill, and I loved helping district leaders implement resources well and use data to inform improvements.

*Continued on p. 12*

**From my earliest days as a student, I knew how fortunate I was to have the opportunity to learn, and I've never wanted to stop.**

**Denise Glyn Borders is executive director of Learning Forward.**





## POLICY AND PRACTICE

Frederick Brown

# THE RESULTS ARE IN: PRINCIPAL PIPELINES MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Intentional principal pipelines are feasible, affordable, and benefit districts, schools, and students in tangible ways. That's the key takeaway from the results of The Wallace Foundation's six-year Principal Pipeline Initiative, an effort to help districts strengthen and make more systemic principal preparation, hiring, development, evaluation, and ongoing professional learning.

Although it may be hard to imagine now, this was not a forgone conclusion. Those of us who have been engaged with The Wallace Foundation or school leadership for the last decade recognize that this was the result of many years of work by educators and researchers alike.

In the mid- to late 2000s, I was a senior program officer at Wallace during a period the foundation often refers to as its first-generation leadership work. At this time, school leadership was a relatively new area of study.

Wallace funded several dozen of what it called "leadership experiments" across the country with grants funding work at both state and district levels. Framing the work was a hypothesis that a systemic approach to leadership, with alignment of practices at the state and district levels, would result in stronger leadership in schools.

Grantees whose work I guided, for example, included efforts focused on master principals in Wisconsin, area education agencies in Iowa, and district leadership systems in Oregon and Ohio. From 2000 to 2010, The Wallace Foundation initiated 140 programs in 24 states and produced more than 70 research reports about the important findings and insights from the work.

Together, these studies demonstrated that principal leadership is a vital component of successful schools. In fact, according to one influential study, leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010). Furthermore, this study found that leadership effects are usually largest where and when they are needed most — that is, in some of our most challenging school environments.

Studies also began to examine the characteristics of effective leaders and what it takes to develop them. Features that emerged include alignment to leadership standards; vigorous, targeted recruitment and selection processes to seek out those with leadership potential; training that prepares principals to lead improved instruction and school change, not just manage buildings; and high-quality mentoring and professional development tailored to individual and



### LEARN MORE

The final report of the Principal Pipeline Initiative, along with previous reports, podcasts, and additional resources, can be found at: [www.wallacefoundation.org/principalpipeline](http://www.wallacefoundation.org/principalpipeline).

**Frederick Brown**  
is deputy executive  
director of Learning  
Forward.

district needs (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007).

The questions that remained were: What would happen if a district implemented all of the components that had been identified as essential for strengthening leadership practice? What if these components were systemic and interrelated? In other words, what would happen if the full pipeline was in place?

Starting in 2011, Wallace's Principal Pipeline Initiative built on the previous studies to address these questions. The initiative funded six urban districts to focus on four key areas:

- Leader standards, or job descriptions, that spell out what principals need to know and be able to do;
- Preservice training that equips enrollees with the knowledge and skills districts need and is given by providers with selective admissions policies;
- Hiring procedures that are data-informed and consider only well-qualified professionals for jobs and make strong matches between candidate and school; and
- On-the-job evaluation and support that are high quality and linked to one another and that serve to help principals, especially novices, improve — particularly in bolstering instructional leadership.

## KEY FINDINGS

Both The RAND Corporation and Policy Studies Associates evaluated the six-year initiative, and the results were published in *Principal Pipelines: A Feasible, Affordable, and Effective Way for Districts to Improve Schools* (Gates, Baird, Master, & Chavez-Herrerias, 2019).

Here are the report's three major findings.

### 1. The principal pipeline work is feasible and affordable.

- Each of the participating

## DISTRICTS THAT PARTICIPATED IN THE PRINCIPAL PIPELINE INITIATIVE

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, North Carolina  
 Denver Public Schools, Colorado  
 Gwinnett County Public Schools, Georgia  
 Hillsborough County Public Schools, Florida  
 New York City Department of Education, New York  
 Prince George's County Public Schools, Maryland

districts was able to implement all of the components of the principal pipeline at scale.

- Participating districts spent about \$42 per student per year on pipeline activities during the initiative — a small amount compared to many other improvement strategies. The lowest-cost components were the development of leader standards and selective hiring and placement.

These findings are notable because the nature of large urban districts is that they are complicated systems where change often comes at a snail's pace. Seeing change at scale in a relatively short period of time is an accomplishment that is not only valuable but relatively uncommon.

### 2. Principal pipelines are effective for principal retention.

- Newly placed principals in participating districts were 5.8 percentage points more likely to remain in their school for at least two years and 7.8 percentage points more likely

to remain in their schools for at least three years than newly placed principals in comparison schools.

Research shows that when principals leave, teacher attrition and students are affected negatively (Béteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2011), and it doesn't take an accountant to imagine the staggering cost of training, hiring, and supporting new principals and teachers in schools impacted by principal turnover. According to School Leaders Network (2014), it costs roughly \$75,000 to replace just the principal. Unfortunately, such outcomes are common: 22% of principals leave their job each year (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.).

When an effort like the Principal Pipeline Initiative finds a statistically significant decrease in principal turnover, it is newsworthy for any district seeking to strengthen teaching and learning at scale while also paying attention to personnel costs.

### 3. Cultivating strong principal pipelines is beneficial for students.

Although there were differences across the six districts, overall effects on achievement were positive in math and reading.

- After three or more years, schools with newly placed principals in participating districts outperformed comparison schools with newly placed principals by 6.22

**According to School Leaders Network (2014), it costs roughly \$75,000 to replace just the principal. Unfortunately, such outcomes are common: 22% of principals leave their job each year.**

percentile points in reading and 2.87 percentile points in math.

- Principal pipeline effects were positive and large for schools in the lowest quartile of the achievement distribution — that is, schools where improvement was particularly needed.
- There were statistically positive effects of the principal pipeline on achievement in elementary and middle schools, and some evidence of positive effects for high schools.

Instinct backed by previous research had suggested to many of us that a coherent district system promoting strong principals would make a difference for students, but these results provide powerful evidence that such investments are indeed worthwhile.

## WHAT DID THE DISTRICTS DO?

One of the strengths of the Principal Pipeline Initiative was detailed documentation about what each of the districts did to build the pipeline components.

The final report is complemented by, and best understood in the context of, a series of implementation reports produced by Policy Studies Associates. These reports, published from 2013 to 2016, detail both the struggles and accomplishments of these districts. The following findings help illuminate how the districts achieved the results they did and point to some promising starting places for other districts looking to improve their own leadership pipelines (Turnbull, Anderson, Riley, MacFarlane, & Aladjem, 2016).

Every district implemented leadership standards that served as the foundation for all the remaining components of the pipeline. Districts also strengthened their data systems to identify potential principals as well as make decisions about placement in schools. Over time, the districts developed longitudinal data systems often referred to as leader tracking systems. The districts used these

## **To prepare principals, districts either created or strengthened their own preservice programs or deepened their collaboration with university programs by making sure those university programs were preparing principals with the skills districts actually needed.**

systems to help keep track of a principal candidate's experience, performance, and assessed competencies.

To prepare principals, districts either created or strengthened their own preservice programs or deepened their collaboration with university programs by making sure those university programs were preparing principals with the skills districts actually needed.

Districts also identified early on a need to change and support the role of assistant principals. As a result of their improved principal preparation programs and structures, many districts had more candidates than they would need to fill principal vacancies. Therefore, they developed strategies to redefine the assistant principal's role and support those leaders.

Each district strengthened evaluation and support for principals. One common strategy was aligning evaluation rubrics to the leadership standards the districts developed at the outset. Strengthening the role of the principal supervisor was another common strategy, leading Wallace to create a separate initiative focused on that role.

## LEARNING IN STAGES

For Learning Forward, one of the particularly interesting aspects of this initiative is the way that participating leaders have strengthened their practice at various stages in their careers, not just at a single preparation point. The importance of these multiple stages is emphasized in and consistent

with Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011).

Many of these districts worked hard to strengthen preservice experiences for principals to make sure aspiring principals' initial learning was aligned to district needs. And university partners paid close attention to using appropriate learning designs, as we outline in the Standards for Professional Learning, creating learning experiences that included active engagement, modeling, reflection, metacognition, application, feedback, and ongoing support after participants exited the programs.

Districts recognized that preservice experiences were necessary but not sufficient. However, many found ongoing professional learning for principals and aspiring principals to be a challenge. Districts struggled as they toggled between group professional learning and individual on-the-job support.

According to the implementation reports, many principals in participating districts reported that professional learning didn't always meet their needs and were often exercises in compliance. When it came to coaching and direct support, however, principals reported appreciation for their principal supervisors, particularly when those supervisors had manageable numbers of principals to support.

As districts consider addressing these professional learning challenges for principals, we encourage them to use the Standards for Professional Learning as a reference. The standards provide guidance for creating a professional learning system for principals based on individual and collective learning needs, resourced effectively, developed using best practices in adult learning, aligned to district leadership standards, focused on implementation of new practices, and evaluated regularly to determine if intended outcomes are being met.

We hope you'll explore the principal pipeline reports and share your insights and questions with

us and our partners at The Wallace Foundation. And we hope you'll join us in our appreciation for the districts, foundation staff, and others who have committed to long-term learning about strengthening school leadership and student learning.

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## CALL TO ACTION / Denise Glyn Borders

*Continued from p. 8*

A beloved mentor, Floretta Dukes McKenzie, then the superintendent of DC Public Schools, urged me to get back into a school system. I spent several years in the central office of Baltimore City Public Schools in Maryland as an assistant, then associate, then chief superintendent, where I covered research, evaluation, assessment, accountability, and planning.

I saw then how few resources teachers had available to support their professional learning. But not until I moved to overseeing those same areas for the Department of Defense Education Activity schools around the world in 35 countries did I realize how it is possible to invest meaningfully in educators.

This system invested so much more in professional learning than I had seen before — 10% of the budget compared to 1% to 3% in domestic systems. The Department of Defense knows not only how to create a continuous improvement environment for young people and officers alike, but also how

**The Department of Defense knows not only how to create a continuous improvement environment for young people and officers alike, but also how critical it is if the goal is to achieve excellence.**

critical it is if the goal is to achieve excellence.

**I believe in building bridges, pushing boundaries, making strategic connections.**

Part of what has driven me to work in different kinds of education organizations is my early recognition of the importance of understanding multiple disciplines if our hope is to transform education.

In college, my degree was interdisciplinary, covering cognitive psychology and education. As a graduate student, I explored the role of sociology, anthropology, socio- and psycho-linguistics, business, and more. The learning sciences is different disciplines coming together to deeply understand how people learn and what teaching must look like to lead to

learning, and that's just what we need — we all get too siloed, boxed in our own worlds.

In my more recent jobs applying research and working in multiple centers, I saw the bigger picture more clearly. All learning flows from previous learning, and this has implications for how schools and districts align their professional learning with district priorities and how they make connections from grade to grade, building to building.

I'm thrilled to be in a position to make more connections — between research and practice, with funders and partners, from district to district. And I know my next learning experience will be with you. I look forward to hearing about your journey and what Learning Forward can do to support you along the way. ■



## BEING FORWARD

Leigh Wall

# COLLABORATION IS THE CENTERPIECE OF ALL LEARNING

**A**t Learning Forward, collaboration is considered the centerpiece of all learning and essential to our practice as educators. We learn better when we learn together. For this reason, we are committed to fostering learning communities within and outside our systems. This professional collaboration occurs in our schools, districts, and organizations, as well as through networks such as the Learning Forward Academy.

Learning communities provide powerful opportunities to gain insight from others' expertise and inquiry. The chance to meet regularly with colleagues allows for the ongoing reflection, feedback, and growth necessary for real professional growth and significant changes in educator practice.

In addition, learning networks, such as Learning Forward's Redesign PD Community and the Student Success Learning Network, help members make connections outside their districts so they can discuss challenges, brainstorm ideas, and share advice. These relationships often become long-lasting, enlightening, and highly influential for practice.

Learning Forward also offers tools and processes that allow network members to step outside of their daily responsibilities and work together to shape and implement a strategic plan for professional learning. By engaging in a collaborative learning community, members also experience firsthand the kind of learning they should facilitate and nurture among the educators with whom they work.

In the Learning Forward Academy, each member identifies a problem of practice and works with coaches and peers from other districts to understand and address it. That is a valuable collaborative opportunity that educators' urgent daily responsibilities rarely allow.

Learning Forward's focus on collaboration is not limited to these formal networks. It drives the structure of our conferences and institutes, infuses the content of our publications, and shapes our consulting services.

The focus on collaboration in the Standards for Professional Learning and in the federal definition of high-quality professional learning that we assisted in shaping is based on research and decades of collective experience. The value of internal and external collaboration within a learning system is instrumental in continuous improvement for the system, as well as the individual educators and their impact on students.

We are troubled, therefore, by the U.S. Secretary of Education's recent proposal to turn federal professional learning funding into a voucher system in which teachers would select individual workshops or courses. This proposal does not encourage the kind of team-based, collaborative learning that is most effective for teachers and students.

We support teachers having the opportunity to inform their professional learning, but selecting a one-time workshop will not allow for the kind of systemic transformation that schools and students require. Real engagement comes from being an active member of a sustained community that values educators' voices, knowledge, and growth.

Regardless of your role, we encourage you to seek out and advocate for collaborative professional learning. We value your membership in the Learning Forward community and encourage you to take advantage of all this community has to offer in developing and extending your learning communities and collaborative learning networks. ■



**We are troubled by the proposal to turn federal professional learning funding into a voucher system in which teachers would select individual workshops or courses.**

**Leigh Wall is president of Learning Forward.**



Calandra Davis



Carolyn Anderson

## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Calandra Davis and Carolyn Anderson

# ACADEMY EXPERIENCE LEADS TO COLLABORATION AND FRIENDSHIP

Collaboration is at the heart of effective professional learning, as Learning Forward emphasizes in the Standards for Professional Learning. Educators who participate in the Learning Forward Academy and other networking experiences, such as the Redesign PD Community and the Student Success Learning Network, frequently report that the relationships they develop with other participants are among the most gratifying and beneficial experiences of their careers. Participants often maintain their relationships for many years.

As Academy members, Carolyn Anderson and Calandra Davis became not only professional collaborators but also close friends. Although they live in different states, they regularly support one another professionally and personally. In a recent conversation with Suzanne Bouffard, editor of *The Learning Professional*, they shared how their relationship makes them stronger leaders and stronger people.

### Q: How did you become friends?

**Calandra Davis:** We were both in the Learning Forward Academy Class of 2017. We met at a reception while having pictures taken [of the class’s scholarship winners]. We realized we have a lot in common. We’re both elementary school principals [in neighboring states]. We’re both from South Carolina and went to Clemson University. But we never knew each other before we met through the Academy.

**Carolyn Anderson:** During breaks [at Academy meetings], we started having conversations about our problems of practice and things we were doing within our schools. Every time we went to an Academy meeting, we would hang out together, and then we started rooming together. We presented together at a conference on things we learned from the Academy.

We began talking outside of the Academy, and we’ve truly become friends. Now we text and call each other all the time, sometimes for personal reasons, sometimes professional. We’ve met each other’s families. My daughter and my mother ask about her all the time. Calandra is so outgoing and fun to be around. She’s authentic.

**Davis:** I feel the same way about you!

### Q: What are some of the things you help each other with?

**Anderson:** We talk a lot about navigating the terrain as administrators — how to be strategic, build relationships, encourage each other when days are tough. We can be one another’s greatest cheerleader because we understand the complexities and nuances of the job, the unspoken rules, how to give strategic advice.

**Davis:** Being women of color in that position [as principals] has its own unique challenges,



**“Now we text and call each other all the time, sometimes for personal reasons, sometimes professional.”**

— Carolyn Anderson

**When it comes to professional learning, we are both passionate about that and we can see the impact that it has on students.**

and we really support each other in that. Also, because I'm from South Carolina but I live in North Carolina and my professional career has been there, I like being able to compare policies [across states]. It helps us know what's going on and stay afloat.

**Anderson:** When it comes to professional learning, we are both passionate about that and we can see the impact that it has on students. Sometimes when we are talking with other administrators who haven't had the [Academy and conference] experiences that we have, they don't have that bird's-eye view perspective. Some of the conversations you have with them don't go as deep.

I think it's because of the experiences we have shared that Calandra and I understand professional learning in a different way.

**Davis:** When I think about taking part in the Academy, once you have that learning experience, you think, "I need to consider the KASABs" [knowledge, attitude, skills, aspiration, and behavior targeted by well-designed professional learning]. Previously, when I would think about doing some type of professional development, I never thought about what's my "end" and how am I going to get to there, and then take the steps to actually plan it out. The Academy shifted my whole practice. Now, when I'm interacting with other administrators who haven't experienced that, it can be a little frustrating or daunting.

That's one of the beautiful things about Carolyn. She and I both understand that you need to go through this process [of thinking through professional learning goals and strategies].

#### WHO THEY ARE:

- Calandra Davis, principal of Jenkins Elementary School in Hickory, North Carolina
- Carolyn Anderson, principal of Barnwell Elementary School in Barnwell, South Carolina

#### HOW THEY MET:

Learning Forward Academy Class of 2017

#### SHARED HISTORY:

- Clemson University alumnae
- South Carolina natives
- Elementary school principals

#### NUMBER OF LEARNING FORWARD ANNUAL CONFERENCES THEY HAVE ATTENDED TOGETHER: 4

#### FOND MEMORY FROM A LEARNING FORWARD CONFERENCE:

**Davis:** "It was so funny being [at the 2017 conference] in Vancouver and we went out to dinner, and Clemson was playing in the [football] playoffs. So there we were in Canada cheering for our Tigers on TV!"

#### BENEFIT THEY VALUED ABOUT THE ACADEMY SCHOLARSHIPS THEY RECEIVED:

Quarterly touchpoint conversations with advisors from the Learning Forward Foundation. Davis says, "They helped get me on track. As with most people who do the Academy, I started out with one problem of practice, and then once you get in it, you realize it's probably not what you need to be doing. Once I shifted, they helped walk me through that process." Anderson adds that the conversations were full of "sage advice and great resources."

#### Q: What have you learned from each other?

**Anderson:** Calandra brings out the more playful side of me. I'm so serious. Sometimes I forget how to relax and breathe and enjoy the moment. She tempers me, and we balance each other.

**Davis:** I'm the risk-taker, always saying, "Let's try it, let's do it!" Carolyn helps me refine some of the things that I would say. She is very skillful at that.

**Anderson:** Any advice Calandra has ever given me, whether it is personal or professional, has been for my best

interest. She has no ulterior motive. I love her for that. She's a great person.

**Davis:** We both are very spiritual, and sometimes we remind each other of that to get each other back on track in times when we get frustrated with whatever is going on. If one of us is stressed out, the other one might say, "Where's your faith?" We center each other again.

**Anderson:** We support each other. When I became part of the Academy, I won a scholarship and a friend. ■



## We want to transform your system into a true learning system.

Learning Forward supports organizations in implementing sustained, standards-based professional learning grounded in a cycle of continuous improvement. This requires all stakeholders in the system to take collective responsibility for adult and student learning, and understand their roles and responsibilities in a learning system.

### We support:



#### DISTRICT LEADERS

to establish the conditions—a shared vision, qualified leadership, aligned resources, measures to learn and improve from, and effective change management—that promote continuous improvement in teaching and learning.



#### SCHOOL LEADERS

to apply the Standards for Professional Learning in their schools and ensure that educators are working in learning communities that engage in ongoing cycles of continuous improvement.



#### TEACHER LEADERS

to form teacher-led learning teams that engage in a cycle of learning that includes analyzing data, setting learning goals, selecting learning designs, implementing new instructional strategies, and assessing and adjusting practice.

## Leadership development at all levels

For more information on how we can provide onsite, customized support for your school or district, go to <https://consulting.learningforward.org/consulting-services/>, or contact Tom Manning at [tom.manning@learningforward.org](mailto:tom.manning@learningforward.org).



## Membership empowers your career

Where can you go to continue your professional growth? No matter if you are new to your role or going deeper after many years, our mission is to build your capacity to establish and sustain highly effective professional learning.

### Membership with Learning Forward helps you:

- Increase your knowledge base.
- Develop new professional skillsets.
- Expand and diversify your professional networks.
- Become an expert in envisioning, planning, implementing, and sustaining change.

*Thank you for being a member and a leader of learning for the teachers and students you serve.*



[www.learningforward.org](http://www.learningforward.org)



Maria Fenwick



Kat Johnston

## WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

Maria Fenwick and Kat Johnston

### CO-LABS DRAW ON EDUCATORS' PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS

**O**n a Wednesday night in February, a group of teachers gathered in the Kendall Square area of Cambridge, Massachusetts — an international hub of high-tech innovation — to engage in some innovative work of their own.

They included a kindergarten teacher from the Boston Public Schools, a middle school Spanish teacher from a nearby charter school, and a high school history teacher from a more affluent suburb. Their career experience ranged from relatively new teachers to seasoned veterans. What they had in common was a desire to learn from one another and to problem-solve around particular challenges related to cultural competency in their classrooms.

The teachers are participating in Co-Labs for Innovation, one of the core programs of the Boston-based Teacher Collaborative. Co-labs bring together educators from different schools and communities, across grade levels and subject areas, to focus on a common area of professional challenge.

Over a 12-week period, the small cohort of educators meets weekly to engage in an inquiry cycle model that allows them to explore and ultimately solve the “pebble in my shoe” type of challenges that typical professional development doesn’t touch.

#### HOW IT BEGAN

The Teacher Collaborative was founded on the premise that teachers are natural problem-solvers and that teachers solve problems better together. In 2017, we founded the organization to build space for Massachusetts educators (from district, charter, and independent schools alike) to connect, share, and ultimately, feel part of a supportive profession that lifts up all students, regardless of whose classroom they sit in.

The Teacher Collaborative emerged from more than a year of listening to teachers in surveys, focus groups, and coffee shop conversations. We heard time and again from teachers in all grades, settings, and career stages that they were hungry for a different kind of professional development designed *by* teachers, *with* teachers, *for* teachers.

The co-lab model provides teachers opportunities to engage with one another, and what happens when they do is simple but powerful. They are able to break down barriers and share new perspectives. They share successes that might otherwise have traveled no farther than their classroom doors, or possibly down the hallway of their building. They also coalesce quickly on what’s common: the care they have for their students, the conscientiousness with which they approach their work, and their constant quest to improve.

Co-labs include a mix of virtual and in-person sessions that take place in the evening over



**Maria Fenwick is the founder and executive director and Kat Johnston is director of programs at the Teacher Collaborative in Boston, Massachusetts.**

dinner. Each session is facilitated by a lead facilitator (one of us) and a supporting facilitator. The program is grant-funded, so there is no cost to participants. The Teacher Collaborative also covers small purchases of classroom materials and supplies to help teachers implement solutions to their problems of practice.

Teacher Collaborative crowdsources our community of educators to determine co-lab topics. The first few cohorts of co-labs have centered around such topics as innovative classroom design, effective parent engagement, and mindfulness for educators.

Beyond a deep focus on the content of the co-lab, participants also get steeped in improvement science and design thinking principles. We spend time unpacking the concepts of success and failure in an effort to normalize the everyday experiences of teachers, no matter their years of experience, or what or whom they teach.

Our model resists the temptation to jump right to solutions. For the first three sessions, participants focus solely on understanding the problem, examining data, consulting research, and simply exploring why a particular challenge persists.

“Taking the time to ask questions and explore the problem was, by far, the most profound part of the process for me,” said one participant. “That is usually rushed through and brushed aside, and I felt that the time devoted to untangling our challenge was not only incredibly valuable to me, but will be something that I adapt to use with children in my classroom.”

Co-labs emphasize that success is not a straight line, and educators embrace this mantra as a prerequisite for their ability to innovate. We also capitalize on small, quick actions that allow teachers to make a change, collect data on its impact, learn from it, and share it with the team.

## PROMISING OUTCOMES

Preliminary feedback data shows promising outcomes. Participants

## Educators who enroll in a co-lab consistently note how rare it is to find opportunities to learn and problem-solve with colleagues from other schools.

universally report that the experience helps them create and sustain real change in their practice. When asked whether they agreed with the statement, “Compared to other professional development I’ve participated in this school year, the co-lab was a more valuable professional learning experience,” 100% of participants either agreed (20%) or strongly agreed (80%).

Educators who enroll in a co-lab consistently note how rare it is to find opportunities to learn and problem-solve with colleagues from other schools. Said one participant, “It’s so nice just to talk about teaching for hours — not grading, not schedules, not where kids are, not logistics, just math teaching. I feel like I never get to think about my teaching anymore because school is always so busy, so it is really refreshing to be able to do that in the co-lab.”

Another said, “I’m constantly craving this level of reflective practice: getting specific and purposeful about the challenge I am facing.”

We’re still learning about the longer-term benefits of the co-lab experience for teachers, but we have uncovered some best practices in how to create cross-school collaboration opportunities. These are:

- **Provide opportunities to build trust early and often:** Co-labs include a mix of in-person and virtual meetings, but we front-load the in-person meetings, since they allow the group to gel more quickly.
- **Emphasize common ground:** We design activities within meetings that are designed to surface what’s common. Why

does this challenge matter to individual group members? What are the common traits that bring teachers into the profession and keep them there?

- **Capitalize on differences:** Too often, school-based inquiry groups can feel like echo chambers, with teachers often limited by the shared experiences in that particular building. Cross-school collaboration opens the door to new perspectives and approaches. Often, slight tweaks based on the recommendation of another teacher are enough to unlock a new line of thinking.
- **Allow for individualized adult learning, just like we do for students:** This is a principle teachers know well when it comes to teaching children, but often gets left behind in adult learning environments. Collaborative opportunities can still be individualized.
- **Offer strong support and accountability:** 100% of co-lab participants report that the ongoing follow-up they received from us and from peers in the group was essential for helping them get from challenge to solution.

The co-lab model works because teachers tap into their own experience and expertise to problem-solve together, and we know that such opportunities for collaboration are few and far between. In fact, we’re always learning from teachers, too, because their feedback enables us to continue tweaking and strengthening the model.

We’re encouraged that the Teacher Collaborative is beginning to make an impact in Massachusetts, and we’re hopeful that teachers across the country will find similar opportunities to overcome pervasive isolation and reinvent outdated professional norms of teaching. ■

Examine. Study. Understand.

# RESEARCH

## HOW TEACHERS INTERPRET STUDENT DATA

**A** recent qualitative study by a team of researchers looked into how grade-level teams of teachers are thinking about causes and strategies based on looking at student performance data. What is interesting in these findings is how infrequently teachers attribute student results to instruction — just 15% of the time. Teachers in this study were much more likely to point to student characteristics such as behavior or effort or to an external factor such as a mismatch between student and the assessment.

— p. **20**



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## RESEARCH REVIEW

Elizabeth Foster

# STUDY EXAMINES TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT DATA

### ► THE STUDY

**Evans, M., Teasdale, R.M., Gannon-Slater, N., La Londe, P.G., Crenshaw, H.L., Greene, J.C., & Schwandt, T.A. (2019).** How did that happen? Teachers' explanations for low test scores. *Teachers College Record*, 121(2).

**C**onversations about effective professional learning communities often point to a focus on data as a way to get specific about differentiated instruction and maintain a focus on student progress.

Policy makers recently have paid quite a bit of attention to the potential of data-driven decision-making to learn more about and potentially improve instruction and address achievement gaps. Yet there is a wide range of interpretations about what data are most valuable, what teachers are expected to do with or think about student data, and how exactly the connections between data and instruction are supposed to be informed and addressed.

### LET US HEAR FROM YOU

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](mailto:elizabeth.foster@learningforward.org).

This line of thinking is especially interesting in light of several ongoing Learning Forward projects. We are particularly interested in how conversations about student learning can be specific about instructional strategies and continued educator learning about what strategies work for which students under which circumstances.

In one project, we're collaborating with the American Institutes of Research, Charlotte Danielson Group, and TeachForward to explore how the teacher team continuous learning cycle described in *Becoming a Learning Team*, 2nd edition (Hirsh & Crow, 2018) can support teachers to identify teaching strategies that align to the teaching clusters described in *Talk About Teaching*, 2nd edition (Danielson, 2016).

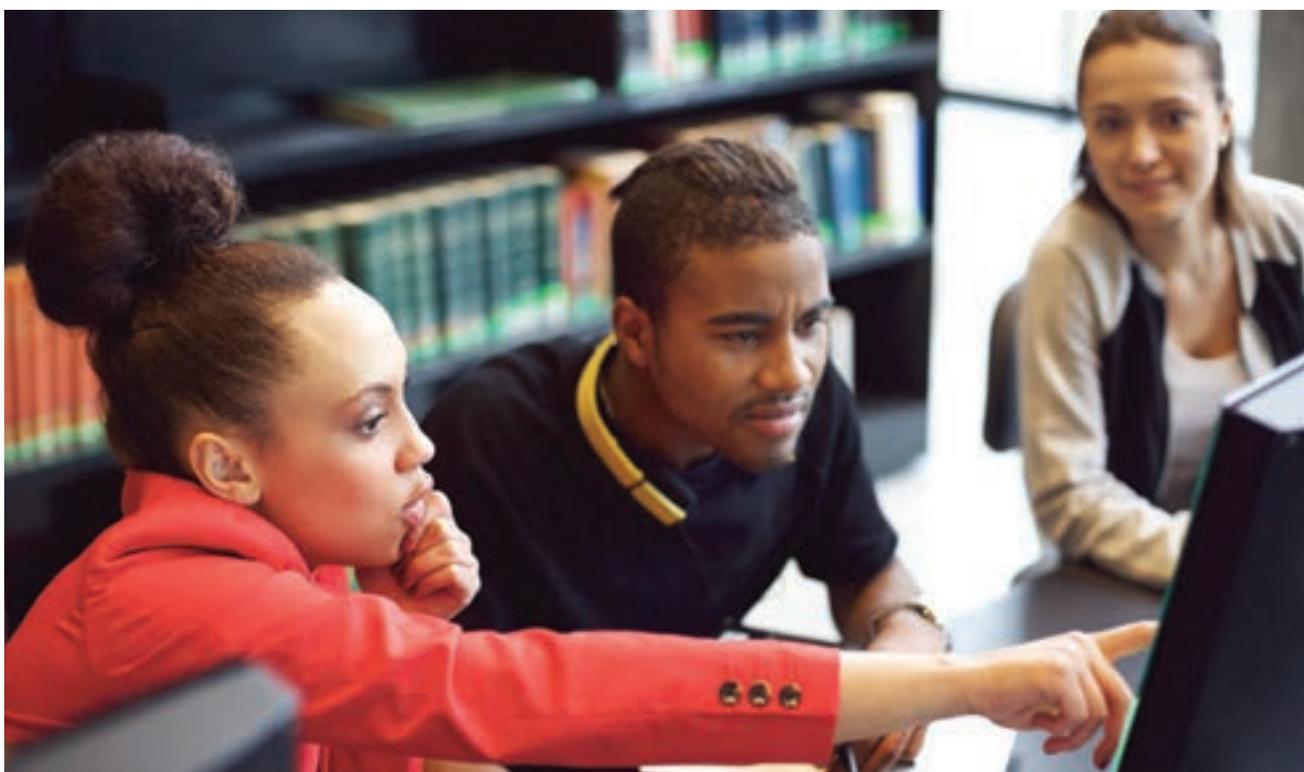
In another, teams of educators in Learning Forward's What Matters Now Network are working to name specific evidence-based practices and instructional strategies that will address the student learning gaps identified in their data analysis.

The Learning Forward perspective for looking at this issue aligns with the broader context of increasing policy and practice expectations that teachers examine data about student performance and then make instructional decisions based on that data.

### ABOUT THE STUDY

A recent qualitative study by a team of researchers looked into how grade-level teams of teachers are thinking about causes and strategies based on looking at student performance data. What is interesting in these findings is how infrequently teachers attribute student results to instruction — just 15% of the time. Teachers in this study were much more likely to point to student characteristics such as behavior or effort or to an external factor such as a mismatch between student and the assessment.

The research team observed six well-established grade-level teams (grades 3-5) over the course of an academic school year as they examined student assessment data. These observations took place in three schools mandated by the district to meet biweekly for a 30-minute block and also to meet quarterly for 90 minutes to examine student performance data.



The three schools used these blocks for different purposes: one to primarily address Response to Intervention decisions by looking at large-scale assessments, one to look at both Response to Intervention decisions and inform broader discussions by using district assessments and classroom-level assessments, and one to have collaborative conversations about students while using a wide range of data, including teachers' own student performance data.

The researchers observed more than 44 hours of meetings and conducted 16 individual interviews and six group interviews with participating teachers. They were particularly interested in what teachers really talk about when they talk about student data and

how what they know about students (and their context) influences their conversation and their next steps.

The researchers noted when teachers focused on a particular data point and also the process of “sense making” among the team — when they related quantitative data to what they know about instruction, students, context, or other influencing factors. Part of what makes this study compelling is that it explores whether the hypothesis that teachers look at student data as a way to connect and adapt their instruction is borne out in practice, especially given a body of research that indicates that student performance is more often attributed to student or contextual factors.

The authors provide a useful

review of literature related to attributions teachers make when they talk about student results. In brief, the extant literature on data-driven decision-making talks about two main relationships between teachers' instruction and students' academic performance: Teachers can use student data to inform future instructional decisions, and student data can be seen as representing the effectiveness of past instruction.

For example, teachers could use assessment data to identify a group of students who have not understood a major concept and then plan a lesson revision or a way to reteach the concept to that group of students. This is often referred to as data driving instruction.

In contrast, student data could

be used to better understand how effectively a teacher taught a particular concept. The research suggests that teachers do not consistently relate student performance to their own instruction, but rather are more likely to point to student characteristics such as effort or level of attention.

There are instances where teachers attribute low student performance data to students' race, gender, or economic status. It seems that the research about what teachers attribute student performance to is contrary to the assumption that adding data will spark a conversation about instruction.

In addition, research suggests that teachers perceive the impact of their own instruction on student achievement data in different ways and that the way they view that relationship impacts their choices about next instructional actions.

“When teachers do not see their work as a contributing factor to students' performance, then they may not consider student data as informative for their instruction,” the researchers note.

If teachers feel that students are unwilling to learn or exert effort, they may be less likely to try a new strategy. And yet the purpose of data-driven decision-making assumes that teachers will look at student data and readily make inferences about their own teaching. This study looked at six data teams to surface the real-time conversations among educators about data.

**FINDINGS**

This study found that the observed teachers did not analyze student performance through the lens of instruction but rather were fairly

quick to attribute the data to student characteristics or, in some cases, to a mismatch of student abilities to the type of assessment given (especially regarding multilingual learners).

The researchers coded some of the discussions as explanations rather than attributions because of the lack of analysis of the reasoning. “We did not observe teachers attempting to systematically identify root causes of student performance,” they state in their findings.

The researchers also did not observe teachers discussing whether student performance was fixed or able to be influenced by different instructional strategies.

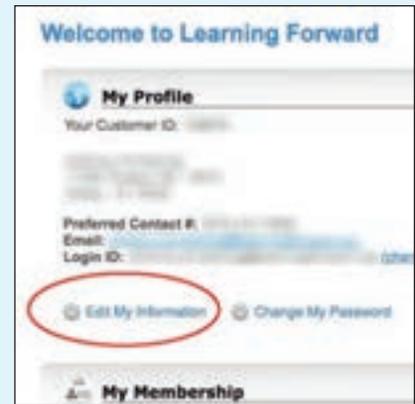
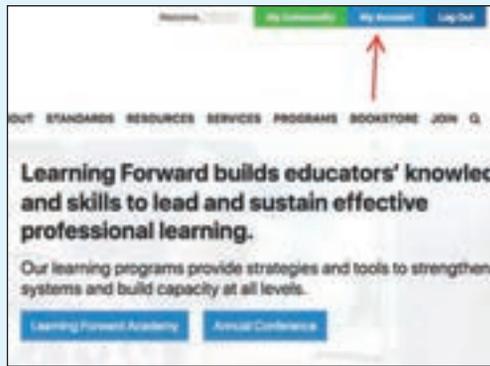
The researchers found that the teachers' explanations of student performance fell into the following categories: 32% related to behavioral characteristics of the student, such as



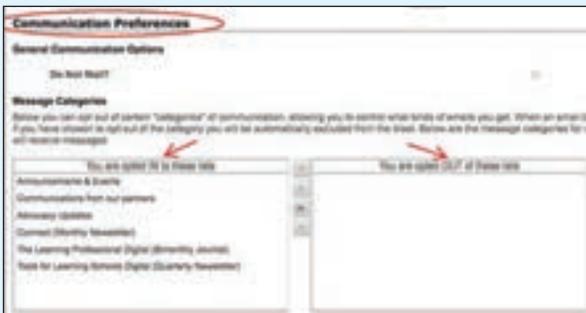
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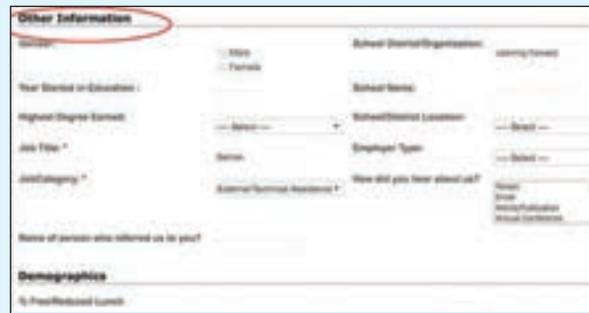
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attitudes or attention; 21% related to a mismatch between the students and the assessment (often related to English fluency); 18% related to suspected or established underlying student conditions, such as dyslexia or emotional issues; 13% related to students' home lives or family circumstances; and 15% related to teachers' instruction.

The researchers also noted that teachers were more likely to discuss student data when performance was low or declining rather than when there was growth or a strong showing. While the researchers expected the teams to discuss what made scores increase when they did, this did not occur.

This may be a lost opportunity because a more explicit discussion of both instructional choices and improvement in student scores would allow teacher teams to map these changes and infer some causal connections to explore further.

There is also a question raised in this study about why teachers don't have a productive discussion about instructional strategies related to students who have disengaged or a group of students who appear not to care about the content.

The schools in the study approached the data conversations with different purposes and priorities. Leadership decisions about how to use these data meetings, how they were set up, and what data were examined and prioritized likely impacted the study's findings.

The norms and expectations of ways in which the educators contributed to the data conversations varied from some commenting only on the data at hand while others were regularly engaged in a broader conversation.

It is also worth noting that, despite the differences across schools in the makeup and operation of the data discussions, most teachers across the sample did not perceive their practice of data-driven decision-making as particularly meaningful.

Keeping in mind that this is a

### Most teachers across the sample did not perceive their practice of data-driven decision-making as particularly meaningful.

relatively small sample size, this study's findings raise interesting questions about what teachers are talking about with regard to student data. It reminds us to be clear from the outset what we are expecting when we ask teachers to look at student data: Is the conversation best focused on student characteristics and the classroom supports needed, or is the conversation better pitched to be about previous teachers' instruction and therefore concepts that need to be retaught? Or is the conversation designed to provide just-in-time feedback about current teaching strategies?

These questions are important for school and district leaders as well as for those who design and lead professional learning. Leaders and designers could explore some of the following points and questions in working with data-driven decision-making initiatives:

- What is the intent of the data-focused discussions? Is that intent clear among the team?
- Does the type of data you are looking at correspond to the purpose of the discussion?
- The composition of teams, the agenda for meetings, and the norms about discussions impact how well individuals and collaborative teams learn and process. Is this factoring into the work?
- Are there prompts for teams to consider both learning abilities and language abilities?
- Is there a process for following up on perceived learning challenges (e.g. referrals)?
- What would it look like for teams to focus on improvements rather than deficits?

- Which is the greatest need in terms of professional learning — professional learning focused on instructional strategies or on cultural context?
- What is the sequence of supports needed for the collaborative team, and which educators need to be included?

This study highlights the need to check professional learning related to data-driven decision-making against several of Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning, primarily the **Leadership, Learning Designs, and Data** standards.

The **Learning Designs** standard asks us to think about what we are trying to achieve with our professional learning. If we are interested in focusing on instructional changes, that needs to be a clear expectation of the data conversations and the data team at the outset. The supporting professional learning needs to have a clear focus on instructional choices related to the concepts at hand and an explicit effort to connect student data to instruction.

If we are interested in what student characteristics need to be better understood or addressed as a result of the data conversations, that is a different expectation and requires a different design and set of resources.

The corresponding professional learning needs to be developed related to identifying strategies to address specific student challenges about learning disabilities or perceived conditions. In addition, the research base that informs this study is a reminder that, at times, educators would benefit from professional learning related to biases about gender, race, family background, and socioeconomic status.

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# ESSENTIALS

## ■ PRINCIPAL TURNOVER

Understanding and Addressing Principal Turnover:

A Review of the Research  
*National Association of Elementary School Principals and Learning Policy Institute, March 19, 2019*

This report reviews 35 studies of principal turnover, a significant problem in American schools that affects teachers and students. It concludes that five major factors influence principals' decisions to leave their jobs: 1) inadequate preparation and professional learning; 2) working conditions including lack of support and insufficient time to complete requirements; 3) low salaries that are not



competitive with other jobs; 4) lack of decision-making authority; and 5) high-stakes accountability systems. The good news is that principals who are well-prepared and have supports such as mentoring are less stressed and stay longer. However, difficult working conditions and higher turnover are more common in schools serving high percentages of low-achieving students, students of color, and those from low-income families. The authors' first recommendation is providing more high-quality professional learning to principals.

[bit.ly/2LiWUZ1](http://bit.ly/2LiWUZ1)

## ■ MATH MATERIALS

Learning by the Book:  
Comparing Math Achievement Growth by Textbook in Six Common Core States  
*Center for Education Policy Research, March 2019*

In this multistate study, researchers compared whether students' math achievement in 4th

and 5th grades differed based on the textbooks and curriculum materials their teachers used. The study found no reliable differences among several popular math curricula, even



when comparing teachers who used the materials in most lessons with those who used them less frequently.

Hypothesizing about this finding, the researchers noted that most teachers had received only a day or two of training in using the materials, and fewer than half had received coaching. The researchers speculate that "it is possible that, with greater supports for classroom implementation, the advantages of certain texts would emerge, but that remains to be seen."

[bit.ly/2U1ktV3](http://bit.ly/2U1ktV3)

## ■ EDUCATIVE CURRICULA

Examining Features of How Professional Development and Enactment of Educative Curricula Influences Elementary Science Teacher Learning  
*Journal of Research in Science Teaching, March 2019*

Educative curricula include support for teachers' learning as well as students' by embedding professional learning in the core instructional materials. This randomized cluster study compared



teaching and learning between a group of teachers who used educative curricula and a group who used traditional curricula preceded by limited professional learning. Teachers in the educative group experienced greater increases in content knowledge and teaching

self-efficacy as well as deeper understanding of scientific inquiry and reform-based teaching. Surprisingly, however, these effects varied according to how much self-efficacy teachers initially brought to the educative curriculum: Those who started with higher self-efficacy made smaller learning gains and so did their students. One possibility is that teachers who knew they had a lot to learn benefited more from the educative materials.

[bit.ly/2vyJJs9](http://bit.ly/2vyJJs9)

## ■ NEW TEACHER MENTORING

Looking Inside and Outside of Mentoring:  
Effects on New Teachers' Organizational Commitment  
*American Educational Research Journal, April 29, 2019*

This study examined the conditions under which mentoring influences new teachers'

commitment to their schools, an affective state that helps to explain job retention. Over 1,000 new teachers

in Chicago Public Schools were surveyed about the nature of the mentoring they received and their feelings of attachment to and involvement in their schools. New teachers who had mentoring that was more frequent and comprehensive and that provided teachers with opportunities for practice had higher levels of organizational commitment. New teachers in schools with stronger principal leadership also showed more commitment. The findings underscore expert advice that the quality and frequency of mentoring matters.

[bit.ly/2PDgYDV](http://bit.ly/2PDgYDV)



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# FOCUS

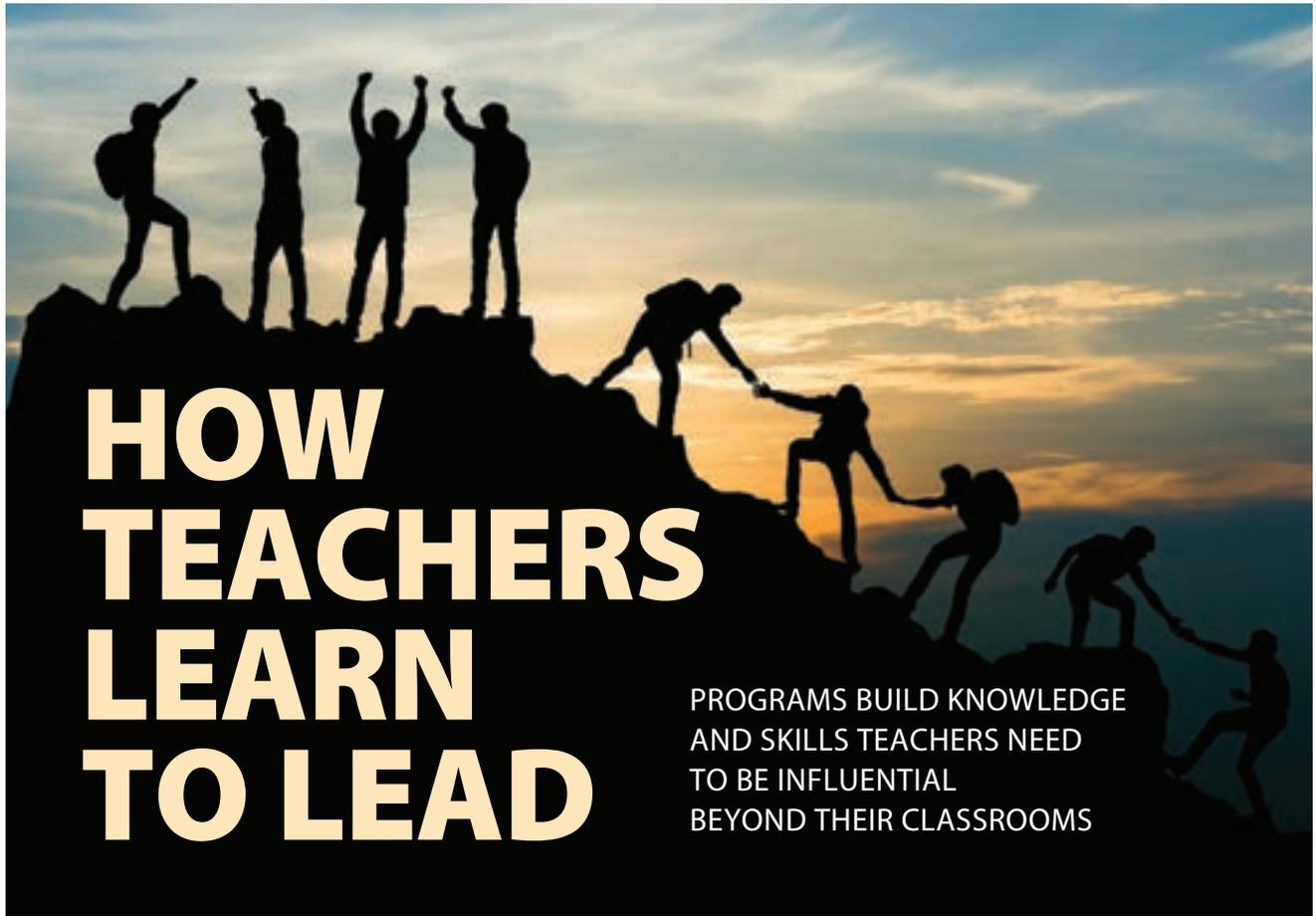
LEARNING BETTER  
BY LEARNING TOGETHER

## THE VALUE OF COLLABORATION

Each teacher brings a unique combination of knowledge, skills, experiences, passions, and talents to his or her school, just as students do to their classrooms. When teachers are able to exchange expertise, challenge each other to meet high expectations, and support each other to meet them, they better serve their own students while also being a tremendous resource for improving the quality of each other's teaching. They become teacher leaders.

HOW  
TEACHERS  
LEARN TO LEAD

p. **26**



BY JILL HARRISON BERG

**W**hile many schools are experimenting with new fads and formulas in an effort to ensure that all students receive what they need to be successful, others have begun to look anew at the resources they already have: teachers.

Each teacher brings a unique combination of knowledge, skills, experiences, passions, and talents to his or her school, just as students do to their classrooms. When teachers are able to exchange expertise, challenge each other to meet high expectations, and support each other to meet them, they better serve their own students while also being a tremendous resource for improving the quality of each other's teaching. They become teacher leaders.

Teacher leaders have unique strengths and opportunities for influencing their colleagues' teaching and learning (Berg, 2018). For example:

- Teachers' deep immersion in the subjects they teach means that they may bring more expertise and passion to mentoring and content coaching than school administrators supervising multiple subjects and grades.
- Teachers bring a unique and grounded perspective to team and school decision-making, thanks to their front-row knowledge of students and their families and their firsthand experience of what it's like to implement their curriculum for the students in front of them.
- Their nonhierarchical relationships with colleagues

can give them an edge in shaping school culture, for example in helping colleagues to be more receptive to change.

However, these important outcomes are possibilities, not probabilities. The knowledge and skills teachers need to be effective as leaders largely lie beyond what most learn in their teacher preparation programs. This includes knowledge of how to build community and shared ownership, managing groups, facilitating dialogue, leading professional learning, guiding evidence-based decision-making, systems thinking, communication and advocacy, and self-care.

By expanding our understanding of the varied ways in which increasing numbers of teachers are learning to lead, we're able to envision potential new opportunities for learning and leadership in every school.

It's worth considering, then, what kind of opportunities have been designed to enhance teachers' capacities to influence each other in these powerful formal and informal ways. In 2017-18, I collaborated with a research team at the Consortium for Policy Research in Education to map the landscape of programs and initiatives in the U.S. that support teacher leaders.

By scanning publicly available information about programs that were referred to us or found on the web, our research team identified, inventoried, and analyzed nearly 300 programs in the United States that support teachers to take on new and varied roles (Berg, Horn, Supovitz, & Margolis, 2019).

We found that each of these programs was designed to support teachers to be leaders in one or more of the following three ways:

1. They **prepared** teachers to lead through professional learning designed to help them build the knowledge and skills they needed to be influential beyond

their classrooms.

2. They **placed** teachers in formal leadership positions that gave them a vantage point for guiding their peers.
3. They **recognized** teachers for possessing valued knowledge, skills, or dispositions and held them up as examples for others to follow.

By examining patterns in how the programs provided one, two, or three of these types of support, we defined seven types of teacher leadership programs (Berg et al., 2019; see sidebar below). Each type of program offers valuable support, but, for this article, I am focused on those that engage teachers in professional learning to prepare them: credential programs, fellowship programs, communities of practice, and professional advancement.

We designed our study to map the range of types of programs and were not able to make claims about the proportionate number of each type of program. However, the majority of

programs we documented included a preparation component and provided examples of ways such programs might align with Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning, as outlined below.

### WHO IS LEADING TEACHER LEADERS' LEARNING?

Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning remind us that effective professional learning requires **leadership** that "develops capacity, advocates, and creates support systems for professional learning." Additionally, effective professional learning is supported by **resources** that have been "prioritized, monitored, and coordinated to support educators' learning" (Learning Forward, 2011). Our study showed that leadership and resources for teacher leaders' professional learning can come from many sources.

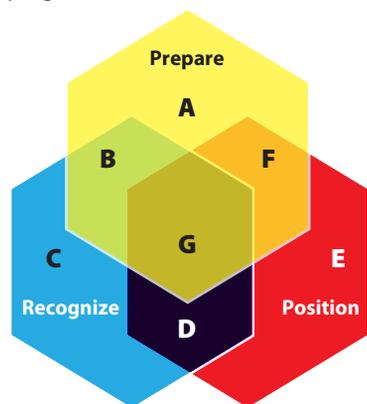
Schools and districts are one source of leadership and resources. They have a vested interest in advancing teacher leaders' learning. The forward-thinking

## 7 TYPES OF TEACHER LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS

Our study of nearly 300 programs that support teachers to take on new and varied roles identified three major forms of support teacher leadership programs provide:

1. Preparation of teachers with knowledge and skills that can help them to lead;
2. Positioning of teachers in leadership roles to capitalize on their expertise; and
3. Recognition of teachers as leaders through awards and other forms of appreciation or acknowledgment.

Each of the identified programs provided one or more of these three forms of support, and patterns emerged among programs that provided similar forms of support. These patterns are described within the report as seven types of teacher leadership programs, outlined below.



<b>Type A:</b> Credential programs	Prepare
<b>Type B:</b> Fellowship programs	Prepare + recognize
<b>Type C:</b> Award programs	Recognize
<b>Type D:</b> Consultancy programs	Recognize + position
<b>Type E:</b> Differentiated work programs	Position
<b>Type F:</b> Communities of practice	Position + prepare
<b>Type G:</b> Professional advancement	Prepare + position + recognize

Source: Berg et al., 2019, [bit.ly/TL\\_Typology](https://bit.ly/TL_Typology).

school or district administrator thinks about building individual expertise in ways that are organizationally useful, and strengthening the capacity of teachers as leaders potentially pays big dividends (Johnson, 2019).

Teacher leader roles that fulfill specific key functions within a school or district are often supported with training, which makes sense. If the role is important, schools or districts should support teachers to perform it skillfully. Some programs build professional learning into the expectations of the role, and they largely do so by bringing teacher leaders together.

More often than not, however, districts do not have the capacity to provide powerful professional learning for teacher leaders, and they turn to education support partners such as institutions of higher education, nonprofit or for-profit organizations, and occasionally civic institutions or professional associations, including unions.

Such organizations bring the expertise and resources needed to effectively build teachers' capacity, allowing districts to focus their attention on matching teachers with roles, creating support systems that extend the learning, and ensuring other resources needed for success, such as time, are allocated.

Individual teachers sometimes turn directly to such education support partners. These preparation experiences can help them build key knowledge and skills and, in some cases, even earn a state licensure endorsement. Teachers do so with the hope of one day securing teacher leader roles but with no guarantee that they will do so. As a result, these teachers may find themselves seeking their own ways to lead. Regardless, teachers are drawn to these experiences in large numbers, often at their own expense, as they are drawn by the love of learning and the experience of learning together.

Teachers also frequently take the lead in finding resources and creating their own professional learning. They

may tap low- or no-cost sources of learning by turning to online sources or networking events (which are often of their own design). When resources are needed, they may apply for grants, fellowships, or scholarships — for example, through organizations such as Fund for Teachers, teachers unions, or their own local university. Such opportunities often bring them into community with others and, in doing so, accelerate the potential for professional learning.

### WHAT ARE TEACHER LEADERS LEARNING?

Since teacher leadership is intended to ultimately influence student achievement, the focus of teacher leaders' professional learning should be informed by what teachers and students need to know and be able to do. To that end, the Standards for Professional Learning suggest, it should be mapped to desired **outcomes** identified in the field and informed by various forms of evidence and **data**, which can also be used to support the cycle of planning, assessment, and evaluation of professional learning.

Programs often prepare teachers for specific roles, whether these are projected future roles or ones in which teachers will be learning on the job. They may be designed to enhance teachers' success in roles that increase colleagues' content knowledge. Literacy and STEM-focused programs, for example, were common in our sample.

In addition or instead, some programs focus on advancing skills and practices needed for specific roles — for example, advocating for equity or leading data use. As long as there is clarity about the focus and purpose of the role, teachers can prepare for the role with specific outcomes in mind, on their own or through support of a program.

Programs and initiatives that are not aligned with specific roles often cast their focus wide on a range of generic leadership skills — for example, as articulated by one of

the existing national frameworks for teacher leadership skill development, the Teacher Leader Model Standards. This framework describes seven key functions teacher leaders might perform and allows program developers to think about what types of skills could be developed to support skillful implementation of each (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2011).

The Teacher Leadership Institute's competencies offer a developmental continuum to guide the progression of knowledge and skill across four broad areas of teacher leadership (Teacher Leadership Institute, n.d.).

The Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession offers a suite of resources, including a teacher leadership skills framework complete with discussion questions and vignettes that invite teacher leaders to unpack and explore the competencies and to do so together (Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession, 2018).

The Teacher Leader Expertise Inventory (Berg, 2018) supports teacher leaders and principals to learn together by identifying essential knowledge and skills teacher leaders need within each component of the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015).

The standards-based outcomes articulated by these four resources allow professional learning to be planned backward and support the collection of data that can monitor and inform teacher leaders' progress.

While most programs are designed with organizational goals in mind, many also aim for outcomes that are valued as individual benefits by teachers.

Programs that bolster teachers' dispositions for reflection and collaboration, for example, help teachers develop a strong sense of efficacy, and those that emphasize the professionalization of teaching have the potential to raise teachers' sense of satisfaction and commitment.

## HOW ARE TEACHER LEADERS LEARNING IT?

Effective professional learning is grounded in “theories, research and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcome” and employs **Learning Designs** informed by these theories, according to Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011).

It is designed with the understanding of learning as a social activity in which members of **Learning Communities** commit to “continuous improvement, collective responsibility and goal alignment,” as well as the research on change to ensure **Implementation** will result in lasting results (Learning Forward, 2011).

Adults learn with a sense of urgency about putting their learning to practice. They want to try on new ideas for size to build their own understandings of why and how new learning is useful (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017; Knowles, 1984).

When teachers already hold leadership roles, they have a ready-made playground for implementing and reflecting on new learning. They may do this on their own or in self-made groups, but programs also exist to help. Programs may provide in-role coaching, offer role-specific workshops, or bring cohorts of teachers together in self-guided communities of practice.

The majority of programs, however, serve teachers who do not yet hold formal leadership roles. These programs tend to engage teachers in alternative opportunities to implement and apply their learning, such as by reflecting on prior experiences, observing current teacher leaders, assuming a role within the program, or designing a special project for the purpose and duration of the program.

These designs, whether grounded in authentic role experiences or not, can support teachers’ continuous improvement when they expose teachers to new expertise and experiences, engage them in problem-solving of shared dilemmas, and

challenge them to reach ever higher in their leadership practice.

Teacher leader preparation programs follow many models, including course-based credentialing programs that offer degrees or certificates, competency-based programs such as microcredentials or the license endorsements in some states, project-based experiences including action research teams and possibly fellowships, or network-based encounters such as EdCamps, conferences, and Twitter chats.

What these varied models have in common is the opportunity for teachers to learn alongside others who have a shared commitment to improve, and, if designed well, they deepen teachers’ commitments to helping each other improve.

## TEACHERS LEADERS’ LEARNING AND LEADERSHIP

The potential benefits of teacher leadership are too enticing to ignore. Why relegate responsibility for improving teaching and learning to only one leader, such as the principal, when every teacher could potentially be developed as a positive influence on the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school?

To be sure, teacher professional learning is not the only condition necessary for teachers to influence their colleagues in positive ways. Other conditions are necessary for teacher leadership to thrive in schools, including a shared vision of quality instruction, collective commitment to the school as a learning community, and structural supports needed for collaboration.

However, these are conditions teachers and administrators can best construct together, and an investment in doing so will pay dividends for years to come as teachers become empowered to take ownership of the responsibility for learning to lead together.

We need more research to evaluate the effectiveness of different types of programs that prepare teachers to lead. In the meantime, Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning

provide a useful guide for lifting up lessons from existing models and crafting powerful new opportunities for teacher leaders’ learning and leadership.

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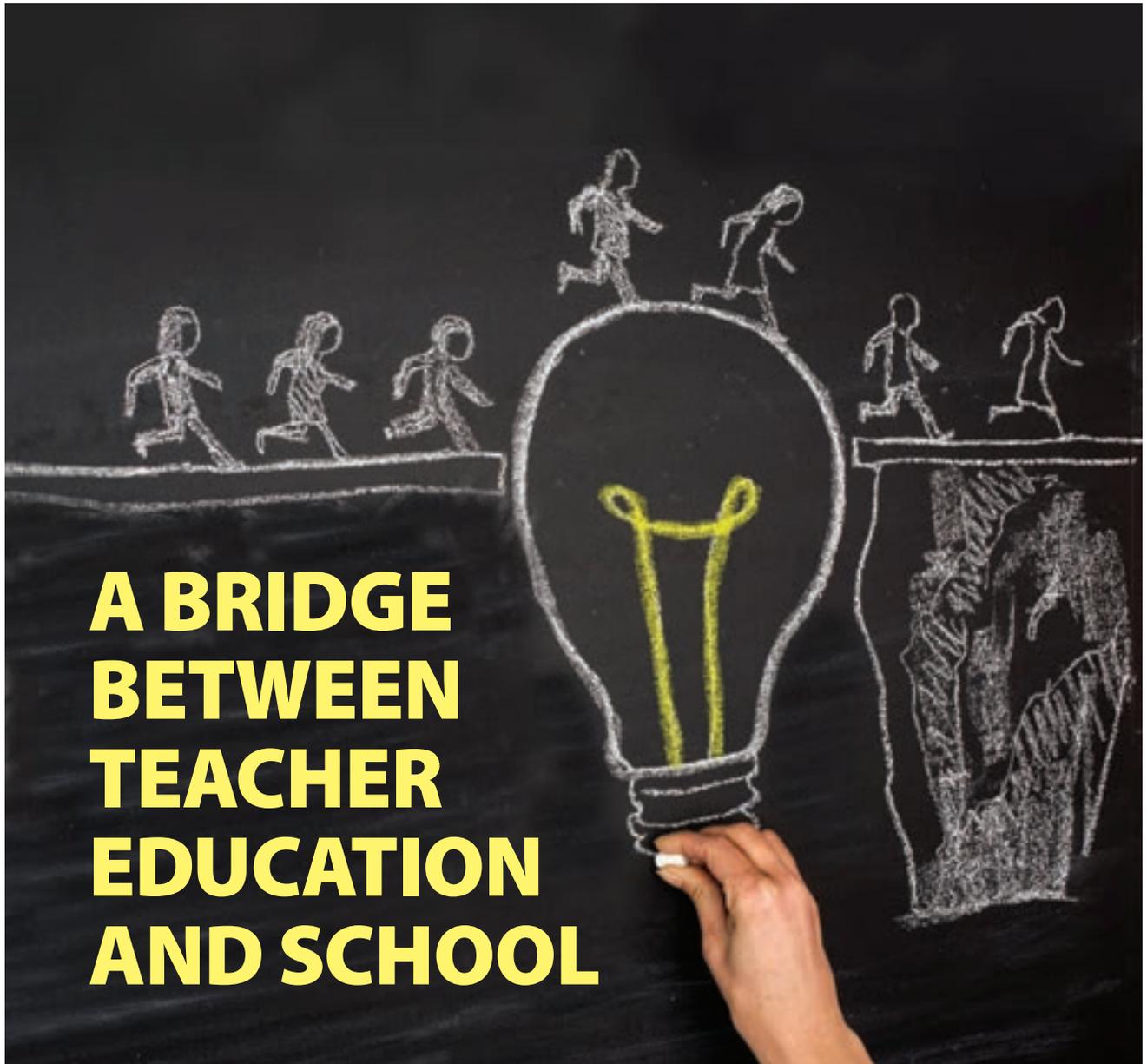
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# A BRIDGE BETWEEN TEACHER EDUCATION AND SCHOOL

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCHOOL DISTRICT SETS GOALS FOR AN ENTIRE DISTRICT

BY RACHELLE CURCIO AND KATE ASCETTA

**U**niversity-school partnerships can be a powerful mechanism for educator professional learning, but they have varying degrees of success. In South Carolina’s School District 5 of Lexington and Richland Counties, superintendent Christina Melton

wanted to make sure her district’s partnership with the University of South Carolina would strategically and systematically attend to enhancing educational opportunities for *all* stakeholders within the district. “What if the university and the entire school district engaged in a systematic partnership? What if we created a

professional development school district?” asked Melton.

Dating back to the work of John Goodlad (1994), professional development school partnerships have been identified as spaces that promote the “simultaneous renewal” (p. 632) of schooling and teacher preparation. They embody the principles of collaborative



**How does a partnership begin between a university and a school district? It takes trust among all parties.**

partnerships, which have been lauded as vehicles for sustained, systemic school improvement solutions (Fullan, 2011; Senge, 2006).

Professional development school partnerships “offer perhaps the strongest bridge between teacher education and classroom outcomes, academics and clinical education, theory and practice, and schools and colleges,” according to Arthur Levine (2006, p. 105).

But a professional development partnership with a whole district would be a bigger undertaking. The commitment was one that we at the University of South Carolina College of Education were ready and enthusiastic to make. Our initial conversation with Melton evolved into an innovative professional development school district partnership.

Unlike traditional professional development school partnerships that create new collaborative school sites, our professional development school district focuses on long-term systematic improvement across the entire district. The emphasis is on enhancing the social, emotional, and physical well-being of students and staff. Our vision encapsulates three overarching goals. One of these goals, which is the focus of this article, emphasizes the well-being of preschool-aged children.

## GOALS

We began in 2018 by developing specific goals that emphasize ongoing

opportunities for reciprocal professional learning across the district. This goal development was guided by tenets of improvement science (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2015), a model in which stakeholders engage in rapid cycle testing of new ideas and adaptation based on data. We also drew on existing improvement structures that have been shown effective in professional learning, such as action research, professional learning communities, and lesson study.

The work of establishing goals and measurable action items for achieving them was overseen by a steering committee consisting of district and university leadership. One of our three overarching goals emerged out of a mutual belief in the need to enhance teaching and learning for all preschool-aged children.

This focus grew out of a prior commitment the district had made to providing high-quality, inclusive learning environments in public school preschool classrooms for 4-year-olds. We sought to extend this commitment to all 3- and 4-year-old general and special education classrooms.

Steering committee members agreed that a key component of this goal is the development, implementation, and monitoring of ongoing professional learning for all District 5 preschool teachers, teaching assistants, and staff. These professional learning experiences would be co-constructed and co-

facilitated by District 5 leadership and University of South Carolina faculty.

This would be the first time that general and special education teachers would engage in simultaneous professional development. Additionally, this would be the first time that lead and assistant early childhood teachers across the district would receive access to the same content. Developing this initiative would be a three-year process. Here is what that process looks like.

## ESTABLISH A PARTNERSHIP:

MAY-JULY 2018

How does a partnership begin between a university and a school district? It takes trust among all parties.

**Listen and learn.** At the start of a new partnership, it is the university liaison’s job to listen and learn about the schools’ goals and their barriers to reaching them. This often means actively fighting our traditional approach as researchers to go in with questions and attempt to answer them. Instead, we must seek to learn from schools what questions they need to have addressed.

In 2018, Kate Ascetta was a new faculty member looking to make lasting connections within her new community. District leaders invited her to hear updates on the inclusion practices of District 5’s early childhood programs. During the introductions of those in attendance at the meeting, Ascetta shared a bit about her



From left, assistant teachers Ruby Williams, Shelia Mickens, Cynthia Keller, and Kimberly Hales collaborate while brainstorming strategies to teach specific social skills to children.

background as a former preschool special educator who found herself in a new state in a new job looking to build a genuine partnership with schools. But mostly she listened.

It is then critical for university liaisons to immerse themselves in the schools they plan to partner with. In our partnership, this immersion began when the director of special education offered to take Ascetta on a districtwide tour to visit their early childhood special education classrooms.

Several weeks later, as they drove around the district, popping into classrooms, they got a chance to chat about their educational backgrounds. The director of special education shared hopes for the district's early childhood classrooms and the perceived barriers to reaching them, and Ascetta shared her own interests and areas of expertise.

It was during that car ride that the two began to build trust and mutual respect. For university educators, it is important to keep in mind that school district administrators, staff, and teachers are the experts in their

community of learning.

**Initial planning.** Planning is an iterative process of identifying goals, designing solutions, and beginning to implement them, while continuing to build relationships. As the next few months went on, their relationship began to solidify through a specific commitment to engage in a multiyear professional development experience with all early childhood teachers, including general and special education teachers.

During a planning discussion, Ascetta asked teachers, "How can I help you reach your goals?" and "What are common areas of concern for teachers and staff in early childhood?" The district and school representatives quickly focused on the social and emotional development of young children and, tied to that, the goal of reducing challenging behavior.

From this, the collaborative goal was to design, evaluate, and implement evidence-based practices that develop the emotional, social, and physical well-being of preschool-aged children. The

specific objective that followed from this was to increase teachers' confidence and competence in supporting the emotional development of their students.

#### **DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION:** AUGUST-DECEMBER 2018

In the second phase of this collaborative work, the group designed multiyear professional development that would be adapted over time based on data to meet the district's evolving needs and barriers. The challenges to address included the number of professional development days spelled out in the teachers' contract, the number of hours assistant teachers worked, the vast size of the district (covering almost 200 geographical miles), and teachers' varied levels of experience with professional development related to social and emotional development.

During planning, we kept in mind the need for professional learning that sustainably and effectively built capacity for all early childhood educators in

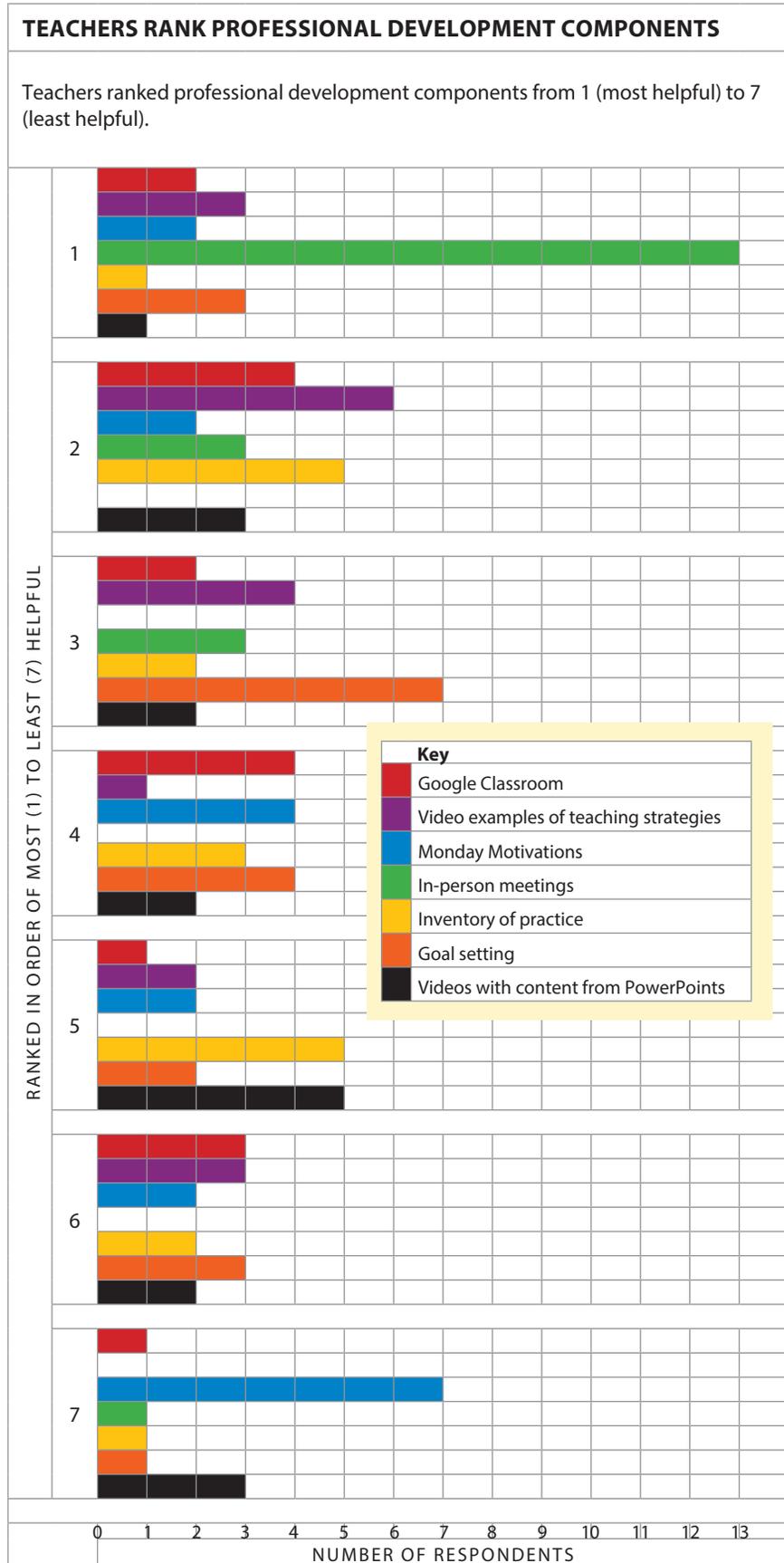
the district to support social and emotional development. Often, addressing challenging behavior is relegated to special education, rather than being a shared understanding that all children may present at some point with challenging behavior because they haven't been taught the skills (e.g. sharing, emotional literacy, problem-solving, etc.) needed to successfully navigate through the world (Fox, Dunlap, Hemmeter, Joseph, & Strain, 2003).

To build this shared responsibility, District 5 clearly communicated that supporting children's social and emotional development wasn't just the job of general educators, special educators, lead teachers, or assistant teachers. All students, regardless of educational placement, deserved to have a teaching team that felt confident and competent in its ability to support their growth, and that meant all teachers deserved to participate in professional learning.

With this in mind, what was the long-term professional learning initiative going to look like? How would we meet the needs of a diverse set of teachers? The blending of general education and special education teachers created some design challenges. How would we meet with 60-plus teachers, and what would this look like for such a large group?

To address these challenges, we flipped the traditional professional development model and provided weekly content in smaller chunks throughout the school year. We used Google Classrooms to provide content because District 5 had already been using Google Classrooms to share information and have discussions, so it was a familiar tool for teachers. We created a joint online classroom for all early childhood and early childhood special education lead and assistant teachers to access.

Then, during the district's 15 professional development dates, we planned to come together and unpack the weekly content provided through



video clips in Google Classroom. The first session was held in late August, and the remaining in-person sessions were held each month to unpack the issues as a larger group.

The weekly content was based on needs identified by teachers. It was important to hear teachers' voices and empower them in this process. We began to develop content by asking teachers to complete a self-evaluation about their perceptions of how they implemented a variety of strategies that lead to supportive teacher-child relationships and learning environments (e.g. greeting children by name upon arrival, their beliefs on challenging behavior, etc.).

Then, informed by these data, teachers received weekly email notifications to view brief content videos about a variety of topics all building on one another. For instance, teachers viewed examples of evidence-based strategies related to creating smooth transitions, infusing choice into the daily routine, and using a visual schedule with children. Ascetta created and edited the videos, guided by the pyramid model (Fox et al., 2003).

### JANUARY 2019 AND BEYOND

The work of our professional development school district partnership is an iterative process, inspired by improvement science. We are constantly collecting data and feedback and adapting and improving our work to meet participants' needs and move toward effectiveness. One of the ways we are informing adaptation is a teacher feedback survey we developed for the project. To date, we have administered the survey once, at the end of the first semester of implementation, with plans to continue to implement biannually at the end of the spring and fall semesters.

On the survey, we asked questions aligned with our mission and collaborative plans: Do you feel your voices are being heard? What future topics would you like to get support in? We also asked participants to rank and provide specific feedback

on the components included in the professional development (e.g. videos, Google Classroom, in-person sessions). Of the 60 staff members surveyed, 21 responded. See their responses in the chart on p. 33.

When analyzing the survey responses, we looked for patterns that emerged. Teachers reported a range of responses. As the chart shows, they had a wide range of opinions about the components of professional development that were most and least helpful, although in-person meetings and video examples of practice were consistently highly rated. Open-ended responses ranged widely, from "I enjoy the meetings being a shared experience as opposed to a PowerPoint" to the following comment: "To be totally honest, I really just do not have time to respond to everything. I barely have time to keep up with all the other emails and tasks I am required to do or respond to. It is not that I don't see the value. It is just one more thing on a plate that has been heaping full for quite some time."

Based on the survey data, we reduced the frequency of content delivered, via Google Classroom, to one video every other week. Additionally, working closely with the district, we found time to increase the number of face-to-face sessions.

District 5 received a grant to train the district-level early childhood staff in the use of a classroom-wide observational measure that will capture teachers' implementation of strategies provided in ongoing professional development. Paired with data schools collect (for example, suspension rates, behavioral consultation calls, increase in students' use of social skills), the results will allow us to continue to capture the impact of our work together and plan for next steps.

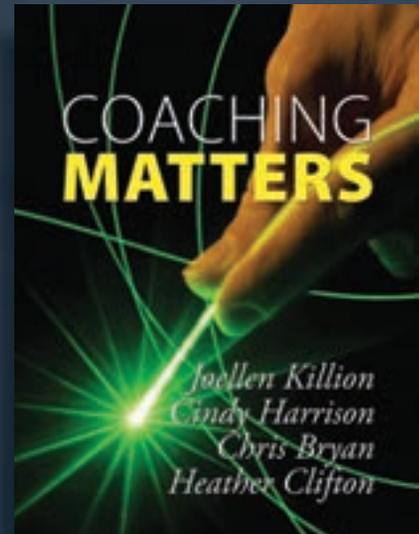
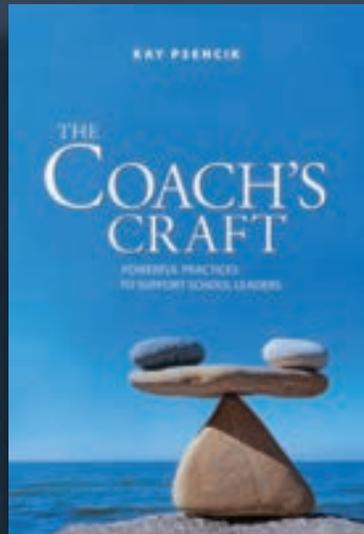
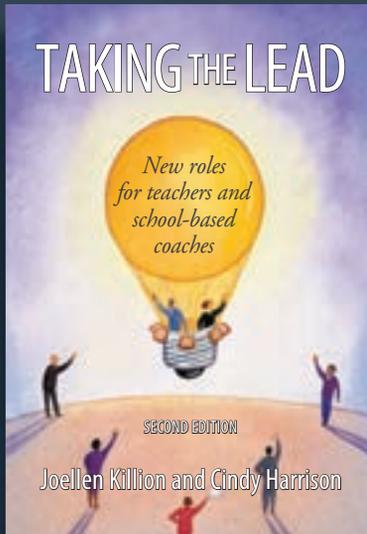
We are using the data to respond to teachers' needs, and we will continue to find ways to adapt our work to meet the ever-changing needs of the early childhood teachers and children in District 5.

We will continue to be guided by the principles of improvement science and our process of plan, implement, adapt, and repeat. We will also maintain our focus on building trust as we build something new because, although the professional development school district is now well-established, there is always something new to learn.

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# CONNECTED THROUGH CONTENT

CHICAGO TEACHERS PARTNER WITH LOYOLA UNIVERSITY TO BUILD A MATH AND SCIENCE LEARNING COMMUNITY

BY JULIE A. JACOBI, SARAH E. STULTS, RACHEL SHEFNER, KARIN E. LANGE, NAYANTARA S. ABRAHAM, AND MEGAN DEIGER

**P**olicymakers and the public are increasingly asking educators to approach instruction from a STEM perspective, integrating science, technology, engineering, and mathematics to prepare students for future careers. At the same time, administrators are directing teachers to make learning more communal and student-driven, emulating the workforce students will likely enter.

Often there is no specific training or support for the teachers who lead these STEM-oriented, collaborative classrooms. A 2013 report issued by the Chicago STEM Education Consortium noted that one fundamental challenge is the absence of a clear and common definition of STEM education (C-STEMEC, 2013).

Since 2003, the Loyola University Center for Science and Math

Education has engaged in professional learning with thousands of teachers in Chicago-area schools, facilitating the development and implementation of high-quality instruction that enhances scientific and mathematical literacy. Our goal is to build a cohort of K-8 teachers who can engage their students as mathematical and scientific thinkers.

Two questions drove our work:

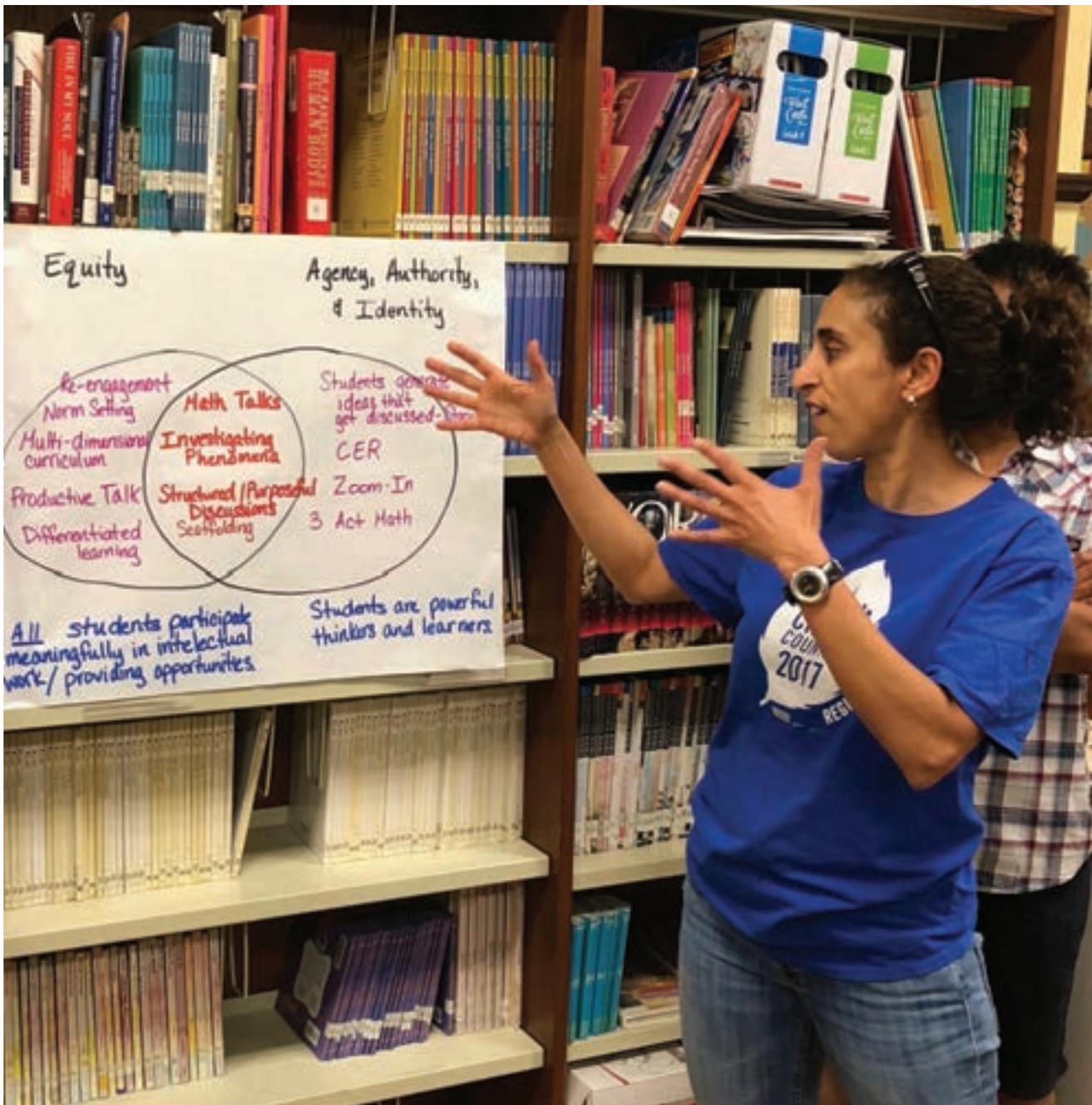
1. How do we get teachers to collaborate around STEM education in a meaningful way?
2. How do we create a common understanding of what science and math integration looks like in the classroom?

An Illinois State Board of Education Math and Science Partnership Program grant allowed us to explore these questions through our Practices in Mathematics and Science: Connections and Collaboration project.

## CONTEXT

Both the Next Generation Science Standards and Common Core State Standards for Mathematics outline a set of practices aimed at engaging students in essential processes of science and mathematics. Predictably, there are many areas of overlap. The intersection of these standards and the many shared practices of scientists and mathematicians inspired the Connections project. For example, both scientists and mathematicians ask questions, make sense of problems, analyze data, and communicate their findings.

Over 16 months, a learning community comprising K-8 teachers from Chicago Public Schools convened to develop an approach to making meaningful connections between these disciplines. The format followed the recommendations in the Standards for



Ezeh Judeh, science teacher at James Shields Middle School, presents her school’s plan for math and science integration to teachers and administration during the 2018 summer institute at Nathan S. Davis Elementary School in Chicago, Illinois.

Professional Learning for a transparent and authentic professional learning community (Learning Forward, 2011).

Chicago Public Schools has 479 elementary schools, most of them serving grades K-8 and nearly 240,000 mostly low-income students. The project centered on one geographic subdistrict of 21 schools serving K-8 students on the west side of Chicago

because district records indicated that teachers in this area had participated in less professional development on the science and math standards than teachers in the rest of the district.

The project team recruited 12 principals to support the project and designate school teams of math and science teachers to participate. A total of 32 teachers participated: two middle

grades teachers and two K-5 teachers from each of eight schools.

Participants engaged in 224 hours of professional development, divided among evening sessions, Saturday follow-up sessions, and two 80-hour intensive summer institutes. Throughout the experience, teachers participated in cross-school, cross-grade-level, and cross-discipline

collaboration.

Early in the project, our goal was to increase understanding of Next Generation Science Standards and Common Core State Standards for Mathematics and the relationship between math and science, as well as to develop and refine strategies for connecting the two disciplines. Our goal later in the project was to use formative assessment strategies to drive integrated instruction and build teachers’ understanding of how students learn about math and science.

**THE FIRST INSTITUTE: BUILDING THE FOUNDATIONS**

During the first summer institute, we focused on building the community and establishing math and science foundations. From the outset, we knew that the key to sustainable integration of math and science in these schools was to form a cohort of teachers motivated to collaborate beyond the scope of the project. We also knew that, before we could begin connecting math and science, we needed to ensure teachers had a strong understanding of each discipline separately, especially because the teachers had differing amounts and areas of expertise.

To meet both the community-building and foundation goals, we organized daily sessions into blocks as outlined in the table above.

During A block, K-8 math teachers met together while grades 6-8 science teachers met separately. Similarly, during B block, K-8 science teachers met together while grades 6-8 math teachers met separately. During C block, all teachers came together to experience connections between math and science.

For example, participants engaged in an activity where they attempted to model a total solar eclipse by using ratios and proportional thinking. From this activity, they learned about the science of an eclipse, reviewing the concept of the orbit of the Earth and its moon. In another C block activity, teachers modeled animal adaptations

<b>SUMMER INSTITUTE BLOCK SCHEDULE, YEAR 1</b>			
<b>BLOCK (3.5 hours)</b>	<b>K-5 teachers</b>	<b>6-8 math teachers</b>	<b>6-8 science teachers</b>
A BLOCK	Math	Math	Science
B BLOCK	Science	Math	Science
C BLOCK	Math/science connections	Math/science connections	Math/science connections

while graphing populations over time, integrating math and science at the middle school level.

This structure allowed us to simultaneously work on teachers’ content knowledge while introducing them to the power of connecting math and science. It also ensured that all 32 teachers engaged with each member of the learning community.

Within the larger groups, teachers worked in strategic, fluid subgroups, which were assigned based on the activity’s purpose. To challenge each other’s thinking about math and science practices, teachers worked in mixed grade levels and schools. If the goal was school leadership, they worked with teachers from their own schools.

**FOLLOW-UP DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR**

Follow-up sessions maintained support for implementation of professional learning during the academic year. During the 2016-17 and 2017-18 school years, participants attended evening and Saturday sessions and also took part in two book studies and a series of online discussion boards and journaling activities, for a total of 64 hours over the academic year.

During evening sessions, participants reflected on implementation, shared strategies to attend to equity, and developed leadership. Saturday sessions were spent engaging with math and science connections and planning for classroom implementation of the strategies they had experienced as learners.

We developed a planning document to guide teachers to explicitly articulate

connections between math and science practices. This document evolved over time to include formative assessment planning and strategies for attending to equity. Teachers also used case studies of teacher leadership in math and science to delve into their role as math and science leaders at their schools (Miller, Moon, & Elko, 2000).

To encourage continued learning between sessions, we provided additional resources through Google Classroom, including professional development guides, slide sets for teacher-led professional development, school math and science vision planning documents, and agenda and notes templates for teacher collaboration.

**THE SECOND INSTITUTE: GROUP COLLABORATION**

At the second summer institute, we structured the institute differently than the previous summer. Because participants now had a foundation of knowledge and many had strong relationships, we brought them together to experience math, science, and integrated activities.

This grouping allowed participants to be immersed in all content areas and experience interpersonal and intellectual connections that may not have emerged in smaller, more separate groups. For example, in a K-8 school, one might assume that middle school teachers would self-identify as content-area leaders. We found this was not always the case and that the K-5 teachers were some of the most vocal contributors during these open-ended learning tasks.

We engaged teachers as learners in

many novel experiences. These were the same kinds of open-ended tasks we encouraged them to use in their classrooms. As one example, teachers engaged with the Triangle Game (Sally & Sally, 2003, pp. 26-27).

In this game, the numbers one through six can be placed so that there is a number on each vertex and a number on the midpoint of each side. The goal is to place the numbers such that all numbers on any given side sum to the same total. After finding one solution, we encouraged teachers to think about the number of possible solutions and what constitutes a unique answer.

We continually modeled strategies that supported equitable participation, ensuring every participant had a role and the opportunity to contribute. In this example, all participants had an entry point, yet they could develop more advanced mathematical thinking by examining the patterns that arise in this problem. This experience created an environment of mutual respect and collaboration as teachers worked together to understand various solution strategies.

We increasingly asked teachers to share both their work and their students' work with the learning community. This gradual approach to making practice public fostered a high level of trust among participants. In addition to sharing implementation attempts at the start of each session, teachers completed quarterly journal entries in Google Classroom to share ongoing reflections on math and science integration.

This work led to a culminating project in which teachers collaborated with colleagues to develop lesson and unit plans for cross-disciplinary instruction. Teachers also worked toward creating a concrete plan for sustaining school-based math and science collaboration.

### **ROLE OF ADMINISTRATORS**

We included school administrators at key points, including at the beginning of the project, to aid

in school-based collaboration and cultivate advocacy for math and science integration. Principals attended one update session midway through the project to discuss math and science collaboration at their schools, and they were also invited to join teachers for a sharing and planning session at the end of both summer institutes.

To facilitate collaboration between teachers and principals, we developed a tool that helps teachers and administrators set schoolwide goals and action plans around math and science and gives them a structure to refer to during future planning sessions.

### **COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY**

The spirit of collective responsibility among all parties went beyond planning and sharing to actually shaping the learning in the project, including a refocusing of the major goals. Although we always knew subject-specific practices would play an important role in the project, we initially assumed teachers would focus on the content connections between math and science.

However, it proved challenging to create learning opportunities that met grade-level standards from both Next Generation Science Standards and Common Core State Standards for Mathematics. For example, an activity that worked toward 5th-grade science goals might only include opportunities to engage students in 3rd-grade math goals.

As a group, we concluded that when teaching students to think like mathematicians and scientists, facilitating connections between math and science processes is more natural and realistic than attempting to integrate math and science content. Facilitators openly acknowledged this change in their thinking and adjusted their plans accordingly, showing they were active members of the learning community.

### **RESULTS AND IMPACT**

We surveyed teachers at three different times to assess the project's impact.

Participants rated items indicating their level of understanding of the practices of the math and science standards, their use of instructional strategies aligned with the standards, and engagement in leadership-related behaviors at their schools. The survey was administered at a kickoff session in June 2017, before the first summer institute, and in August 2018 on the final day of the second summer institute.

Analysis of survey results with paired samples tests ( $N=22$ ) indicated several statistically significant findings. Survey results indicated that both math and science teachers' confidence in their ability to implement Next Generation Science Standards and Common Core State Standards for Mathematics made statistically significant improvement over the course of the project.

On a five-point Likert scale, their post-program responses moved from agree [ $M=2.1$ ] toward strongly agree [ $M=2.5$ ] for Common Core State Standards for Mathematics and from disagree [ $M=1.6$ ] towards strongly agree [ $M=2.4$ ] for Next Generation Science Standards [both,  $p<0.01$ ].

Additionally, teachers reported a statistically significant increase [ $p<0.01$ ] in knowledge of Next Generation Science Standards and Common Core State Standards for Mathematics practices and ability to make connections between the two content areas, although the increase for Next Generation Science Standards came largely from K-5 rather than 6-8 teachers.

In addition to the survey, teachers demonstrated increased knowledge of the practices through their ability to engage in more nuanced conversations about which practices are important to highlight in different classroom tasks, which we observed during our professional learning sessions.

Also, the K-5 math and science teachers reported a gradual and significant increase [ $p<0.05$ ] in the frequency of engagement in leadership activities at their schools, such as

*Continued on p. 44*



# ALL TOGETHER NOW

INTERNAL COHERENCE FRAMEWORK  
SUPPORTS INSTRUCTIONAL  
LEADERSHIP TEAMS

BY ELIZABETH LEISY STOSICH, MICHELLE L. FORMAN, AND CANDICE BOCALA

**M**ore than a decade of research suggests that improving the quality of instruction and student learning requires leaders to set a vision for instruction, promote teacher learning around that vision, and foster organizational conditions for teacher collaboration and growth (Louis, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom, 2010). Yet designing professional learning that enhances instructional leadership has proven challenging.

Previous attempts may have been unsuccessful because they targeted only school principals rather than teams of leaders or because they were

conducted away from school sites rather than being job-embedded. Increasing school leaders' *knowledge* of curriculum, instruction, and assessment is insufficient. Improving instructional leadership requires increasing school leaders' *direct involvement* with teachers in these core areas.

A team-based approach to professional learning is more effective in enhancing the instructional leadership capabilities of administrators and teachers. Instructional leadership teams are a promising model for such an approach. These teams involve administrators and teachers in collectively improving teaching and learning through collaborative

professional learning and a shared commitment to instructional improvement. This shared approach to leadership requires joint practice and learning. As our colleague Richard Elmore says, "You learn the work by doing the work."

We have worked collaboratively with district, school, and teacher leaders over the past 10 years to develop an approach we call the *internal coherence approach* to school improvement. With this approach, instructional leadership teams can transform their organizations from low-performing or stagnant to high-performing or improving.

This work began in the context of a collaboration between the Strategic

Education Research Partnership and Boston Public Schools and has been strengthened by partnerships with districts in California, Texas, and New York. Internal coherence is defined as the “collective capability of the adults in a school or educational system to connect and align resources to carry out an improvement strategy” (Forman, Stosich, & Bocala, 2017, pp. 2-3). By working toward higher levels of internal coherence, instructional leadership teams foster shared instructional leadership and build connections between teacher learning and student learning.

### SHARED INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Research indicates that students learn at higher levels in schools where principals and teachers mutually contribute to leadership, as opposed to schools that lack teacher involvement in instructional decision-making (Ingersoll, Sirindes, & Dougherty, 2017).

Accordingly, leaders are under pressure to move away from hierarchical forms of leadership and toward shared or distributed models of leadership that engage administrators and teachers as partners. However,

principals can find it difficult to share authority for decision-making with teachers on instructional leadership teams.

The internal coherence approach addresses this challenge by fostering shared leadership in a supportive environment that reinforces norms of public learning and safety for risk-taking. Through a team-based approach, principals involve teachers in sustained dialogue and decision-making about instruction and student learning while remaining central agents for change.

We worked with a principal and the instructional leadership team in a school that had been relatively successful in supporting the success of their students, including a large and diverse population of English learners, under the direction of a capable yet highly directive principal. However, when the principal learned more about the importance of involving teachers in setting school goals for improvement, educators on the instructional leadership team developed a greater sense of commitment to and responsibility for reaching these goals.

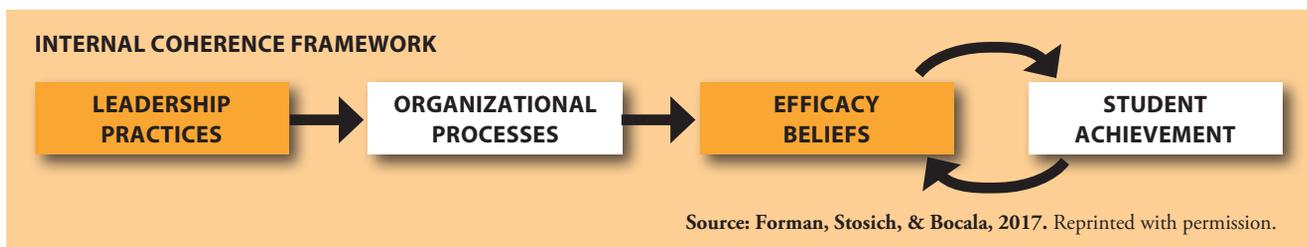
An instructional coach on the instructional leadership team described how the collaborative process they

used to develop their vision, which focused on supporting students to have academic conversations, changed the way they worked as a school: “We need each other. ... Now I feel like I’m part of a system that’s helping us all work together to support our students.”

### CONNECTING STUDENT LEARNING AND TEACHER LEARNING

We designed the internal coherence approach to help instructional leadership teams create a consistent throughline from their vision for student learning to their goals for teacher learning. Too often, educators cannot see the connections between students’ needs and professional learning opportunities and resources, which can lead to frustration with professional learning or other improvement efforts.

In contrast, the internal coherence approach emphasizes aligning professional learning resources around a vision for improved student learning. As illustrated in the figure below, the internal coherence approach to school improvement connects the work of leaders as the drivers of improvement, the organizational conditions that support meaningful



professional learning, and teachers' beliefs about their efficacy in supporting student learning, which are positively associated with productive behaviors for improving student learning.

Specifically, this approach supports instructional leadership team members in developing a shared vision and strategy for improving teaching and learning, providing the opportunities for professional learning necessary to advance this strategy, and creating organizational conditions to support teachers in working collaboratively in teams to improve their practice. Each of these actions helps to ensure teachers' success with their students and, thus, raises the level of teachers' efficacy beliefs, which drives further improvement.

In a school context, efficacy refers to educators' beliefs that they can improve student achievement through intentional and effective practice. Experiences of efficacy are key because they motivate educators to try harder, attend more closely to low-performing students, and, ultimately, produce higher levels of student learning.

*Collective efficacy* — the idea that the faculty, working together, has what it takes to improve student learning — is particularly important for schoolwide improvement. Research shows that teachers' beliefs about their collective ability to support student learning are a more powerful predictor of student achievement than students' background demographics, such as race and socioeconomic status (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2004).

Leaders, therefore, must optimally position educators to fortify their beliefs in their collective ability to improve student learning and, in doing so, encourage the productive behaviors that can fuel future improvement efforts.

In our experience in schools and districts, leadership development is particularly powerful when members of an instructional leadership team engage in what we describe as *essential practices*. These practices are based in research but have been systematically

## GET THE SURVEY

Download the Internal Coherence Survey at [ic.serpmedia.org/assets/internal\\_coherence\\_survey\\_october2016.pdf](http://ic.serpmedia.org/assets/internal_coherence_survey_october2016.pdf).

developed and tested with practitioners to assist them in carrying out their core responsibilities effectively.

These essential practices make the work of improvement and instructional leadership concrete and actionable. To foster internal coherence, instructional leadership teams can begin by using three essential practices: setting a vision, creating a strategy for whole-school learning to reach the vision, and using data on organizational strengths and weaknesses.

### 1. Develop a vision for the instructional core.

Setting a vision for instruction and student learning is a critical leadership practice. Further, setting a vision is more powerful when leaders work collaboratively to make critical instructional decisions than when principals work in isolation.

The internal coherence approach includes a detailed process to support instructional leadership teams in collaboratively developing this vision, which serves as a guide for the improvement journey. When educators use frameworks such as the instructional core (Cohen & Ball, 1999) in combination with disciplinary content knowledge to create a vision, they can develop shared language to describe the nature of the interactions among teachers, students, and instructional content able to generate ambitious and equitable student outcomes.

When all educators have a clear sense of what they want to see in the instructional core — or, the way teachers and students will work with rigorous academic content — they are better able to take action to meet these goals.

A vision should be overarching but not vague. Too often, educational

leaders focus on adopting a new curriculum or instructional approach without connecting it to a more specific vision of what students should be able to know and do, as well as a plan to support educators to make the necessary instructional shifts.

We worked with a district that had adopted an ambitious mathematics curriculum intended to support students in meeting the expectations of new college- and career-readiness standards. Initially, one school's instructional leadership team defined its vision as simply implementing the new program.

After engaging in the instructional visioning practice, however, team members began to identify the specific shifts they hoped to see in the instructional core — for example, students explaining the mathematical processes they used and justifying their answers with evidence. Then they were able to coordinate the work of everyone in the organization — administrators, teachers, and teams — to meet these goals.

### 2. Develop a strategy for instructional improvement.

Schools with high internal coherence develop not only a shared vision for effective instructional practice but a concrete plan for professional learning to work toward this goal.

When instructional leadership teams develop an improvement strategy, team members must identify the specific learning necessary to reach the instructional vision as well as the structures and processes that can be put in place to support this learning.

In other words, this practice requires instructional leadership teams to identify what will be learned, who will do the learning, where this

learning will occur, and how it will be coordinated to support schoolwide improvement.

In our experience, the acknowledgment that student success depends on a coordinated, organizational effort rather than solely the energy of individual teachers inside their classrooms resonates with practitioners.

For example, veteran teachers in one underperforming middle school articulated their excitement at hearing that they were finally going to work on conditions in the school at large, rather than being told that improvement was simply a function of individual educators teaching harder, teaching differently, or teaching more. Further, working collaboratively as an instructional leadership team to develop a strategy for improvement ensures teachers' voices are part of the decision-making process and increases their commitment to lead instructional change.

### **3. Use the Internal Coherence Survey to analyze current organizational capacity.**

Once leaders have articulated their vision for instruction and created a strategy to coordinate the organizational resources to accomplish this vision, they need systems for collecting, analyzing, and acting on data that reflects progress toward this vision.

This information must go beyond data on student achievement to include data on organizational factors that enhance teacher learning and student performance, specifically those factors that leaders can influence, such as the extent to which teachers view their professional learning as meaningful and have sufficient time and support for collaboration in teams.

To deepen schools' data use practice, we developed the Internal Coherence Survey to use as part of leadership development. Using this survey, instructional leadership teams become better prepared to diagnose and take actions to improve organizational supports for professional learning

(Elmore, Forman, & Stosich, 2016). Additionally, the survey provides an opportunity for all educators in the organization to participate in the improvement process by sharing their perspectives on critical school conditions.

The Internal Coherence Survey captures teachers' perceptions of the principal's instructional leadership, teacher collaboration for instructional improvement, meaningful professional learning, and other conditions and processes for supporting school improvement. We recommend that all faculty members responsible for instruction (e.g. teachers, paraprofessionals) complete the survey each year to allow the school community to assess its progress in strengthening conditions for learning and improvement over time.

A central part of our approach to leadership development involves reviewing and discussing the data from the Internal Coherence Survey, as it enables instructional leadership teams to align professional learning with what is needed most in their unique school context.

The results of the Internal Coherence Survey can support instructional leadership teams with diagnosing organizational strengths and weaknesses that could support or hinder their ability to successfully organize the adult learning required to reach their instructional vision. Thus, the survey data can be used to tailor a school's improvement strategy to the current reality of its organization, maximizing its chances for success.

For example, if a school's Internal Coherence Survey showed that most teachers viewed the time spent in teams as unproductive, a strategy relying heavily on teacher collaboration would have a low chance of gaining traction. An instructional leadership team with this profile might decide that the early phases of its improvement strategy would rely on whole-school professional learning led by an external expert, and that the instructional leadership team

would work to fortify team processes over time.

Conversely, a school in which the Internal Coherence Survey revealed that teachers had positive perceptions of their teams' purpose and processes would do well to leverage this organizational capital and make sure that any improvement strategy placed a heavy emphasis on work in these structures.

### **SUSTAINING LEARNING OVER TIME**

When educators work in a school where vision, improvement initiatives, professional learning, and their collaboration with colleagues all converge on the difficult work of rethinking current practices, teachers are optimally positioned to interact with students and content in more ambitious ways. When educators witness previously unseen levels of student thinking or engagement as a consequence of their changed practice, they revise their beliefs about what they and their students can do.

Education leaders can create these schools through a team-based approach to leadership development grounded in these essential practices. Developing the collective leadership capabilities of instructional leadership team members rather than principals alone can maximize the chance that their learning will be shared and sustained over time, even in the face of leadership turnover.

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Connected through content

*Continued from p. 39*  
planning and facilitating school-based professional learning on the math and science standards at the start of the 2018-19 school year.

At the end of the project, many schools indicated to facilitators that they planned to continue teacher collaboration on STEM practices, and we will continue to track teachers' knowledge and growth. At the start of the 2018-19 school year, district administrators asked us to continue the project. They elected to use their own funds to bring teachers together for four additional evening sessions. This continued work will be instrumental in ensuring the sustainability of the project goals.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

We believe that three major design features were key to the development of the Connections project learning community.

*Authentic and diverse collaboration.* Teacher participants were most engaged when they saw direct implications for classroom instruction through authentic, challenging learning activities, such as the eclipse simulation described above. The diversity of participants' backgrounds and roles also contributed to a high level of collaboration and discourse, building participants' confidence and relationships with each other.

*Trust through mutual accountability.*

The cohort of 32 teachers, along with the facilitators, knew from early in the project that they would hold each other accountable for learning. The book studies required teachers to respond to each other's feedback through the online platform. Later, the structure of the open-ended learning tasks required participants to ask questions and share ideas in an open forum.

*Collective responsibility.* Because teachers would see each other again in the context of their schools, there was a sense of future accountability to bring the learning back to their classrooms. Our emphasis on gradually developing leadership skills further imparted the expectation that participants would become advocates for math and science, making sustainable collaboration more likely.

This approach may have worked partially because this project was unusually intense: 224 professional development hours in 16 months. Developing teacher leaders is a complex process that was made possible in this project by the considerable time commitment and support from the learning community.

Meaningful and sustained teacher collaboration is an essential piece of realizing a shared vision for STEM education. Although specific instructional goals around math and science integration will continue to

change, active professional learning communities engaging in an iterative process of implementation and reflection will directly impact the success of reaching these goals.

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# THE POWER OF A

# PLC

ARIZONA PRINCIPALS BUILD  
CROSS-CAMPUS COLLABORATION AMONG TEACHERS

BY BETH BISHOP, AMY BREITENBUCHER, ANDREA LANG SIMS,  
STEPHANIE MONTEZ, AND CHRISTEL SWINEHART-ARBOGAST

**A**s principals, we work diligently to ensure that our teachers collaborate to develop the best education for our students, but how often are we as principals practicing what we preach? Being a principal can be a lonely role, but when we engage in collaboration and collective inquiry, we can move our teachers and students forward.

We came together from five different elementary schools in Mesa

(Arizona) Public Schools to tackle some of our common challenges and strengthen our schools individually and collectively. Our leadership collaboration has led to ongoing collaboration among our teachers, which is helpful for all of us but, most importantly, for our students.

#### **HOW OUR COLLABORATION BEGAN**

Our collaboration began organically and unexpectedly. While attending a

districtwide meeting, we realized we were all unsure how to proceed with a district initiative. As we worked together to gain clarity, we realized that we faced similar challenges beyond that one initiative.

We also served similar populations of students, with the majority of our students qualifying for free and reduced lunch, living in low-income housing or child crisis centers, and learning English. Each of our schools has a high mobility rate — because of



our proximity to one another, many students move among our five campuses — and, ultimately, our students feed into one high school. For all of these reasons, it made sense to share ideas and strategies.

Several principals from our district had made a decision to participate in a collaborative project led by the Arizona Department of Education and Learning Forward and supported by American Express that aimed to support principal professional learning. Through this project, called Learning Leaders for Learning Schools, we had come to realize the power of learning with other principals.

We also were studying significant content that shaped our thinking, including the Standards for Professional Learning and the cycle of continuous improvement. So as we grappled with the new district initiative, those of us in Learning Leaders for Learning Schools began to think about the possibility of working with other principals in the district to better serve all our staff.

Initially, the five of us met about once a month to engage in a collective inquiry process, starting with a book study and some great conversations. This evolved into a bimonthly meeting because of the benefits we experienced working together.

As we held more book studies and examined the work of Michael Schmoker and John Hattie, it became increasingly clear that we were experiencing some of the same obstacles in increasing student achievement. We found inconsistencies in depth of content knowledge, core instruction, and grading practices.

To deepen teaching and learning, we narrowed our focus on the need to move our teachers from posting learning objectives to making learning visible through learning targets and

success criteria. We realized that our teachers needed to begin with a deeper understanding of the Standards for Professional Learning.

To achieve this goal, we became a professional learning community (PLC) by collectively reviewing our student achievement data, examining our sites' understanding of state standards and implementation, reading professional resources, working with outside consultants, and developing learning experiences for teachers.

As we did this, we grew as leaders. We were able to identify our own inconsistencies and focus on what the five of us needed to learn to provide better direction for our schools.

Once we built rapport and were able to speak openly and honestly, we discovered many other common interests and needs as well, including the struggles of day-to-day discipline, evaluations, staffing, and balancing life beyond work. These working relationships are few and far between in the principalship.

Through our conversations, not only did we give each other ideas for addressing these challenges, but we also supported one another to become more confident and informed instructional leaders, effectively becoming a true principal PLC.

### **FROM PRINCIPAL COLLABORATION TO TEACHER COLLABORATION**

As we worked together, we realized our teacher teams could benefit from collaborating, too. We wanted them to learn and grow from each other, just as we had, and have partners along the visible learning journey. Facilitating cross-campus collaboration has been one of the most rewarding outcomes of our PLC. Over time, we have learned valuable lessons about how to make

cross-campus collaboration work smoothly and effectively.

The first collaboration took the form of professional development centered on learning targets and success criteria for the teachers from all five schools (about 150 teachers). Although teachers gained knowledge in these areas, we learned some hard lessons when there were unanticipated hurdles with space, the large group size, and confusion about next steps.

These first-step struggles reflected our inexperience with a new way of engaging in professional learning in our district. It would have been easy to scrap the whole thing. But because we trusted our collaboration and were passionate about improving our students' results, we were able to identify the problems and work toward solutions.

We took comfort in knowing it was far easier to go through this process together. It was a new experience bringing multiple faculty groups together for professional development. There was a high chance for pushback from teachers, so we needed to make sure our efforts were well-planned and carefully rolled out.

Facing challenges in great company allowed us to regroup and recognize we were not ready to answer the many questions that were posed. Teachers were experiencing obstacles in connecting their learning targets to state standards. It was obvious that we had to circle back to first focus on the foundation of standards fluency before delving into the specificity of learning targets and success criteria.

Because we asked teachers for feedback and learned from this experience, our second attempt to have our staffs work together resulted in a far more effective process. We divided the teachers into cross-campus, grade-

level cohorts, and each of us, along with instructional coaches from each site, led one of the seven groups.

The sessions were held at the same time but in five locations to avoid the pitfalls of the previous collaboration attempt. Grade-level teams worked on deconstructing a single standard. The five of us developed professional learning that we replicated with all of the grade levels so that every teacher would deconstruct the standards using the same protocol.

First, teachers identified their grade-level standard and the same standard from the grade level below. Then they determined what the intermittent skills and knowledge were between the two standards. This structure allowed grade-level teams to work together to identify the skills needed to master the grade-level standard.

Before moving onto the next step, they worked to build consensus. Each grade level used the same graphic organizer to determine the needed steps for grade-level mastery. To lead this work successfully, the five of us needed to have a common understanding of the what, why, and how of deconstructing standards.

### KEY STRATEGIES FOR CROSS-CAMPUS COLLABORATION

Through this process of building and improving collaboration, we discovered key strategies that may be helpful for other cross-campus efforts.

**Gather teacher feedback.** At the first convening, teachers filled out a feedback survey, and we trusted they would help guide our future professional learning plans. Putting the trust in teachers as professionals to inform us, as instructional leaders, turned our perceived failure into a valuable learning experience about teacher needs.

It was our job as the leaders of our campuses to use the reflection to change and improve professional learning. We realized that we needed to take a step back and change our approach. Instead of ensuring everyone heard the same

message by being in the same room, we made sure that the five of us and our instructional specialists had a strong knowledge base and could each lead our own grade-level groups.

**Ensure consistent messaging.** Since we were working with one another's teachers, we ensured our messages were consistent and transparent. At no time did any of us have to correct the wording or work of another principal we were working with — a testament to the effectiveness of our communication and planning. This was possible because of solid trust and faith we had in one another's professional expertise and personal integrity.

**Maintain ongoing communication through technology.** After the sessions and over the summer, we wanted to ensure sustainability of the learning and also offer support for new teachers. Before the new school year began, we developed a refresher session about learning targets and success criteria, which we would each lead at our own campus, so that staff members could navigate the needs of our own populations.

But we wanted our teachers to stay connected, and we found that we needed a medium to connect our schools in a fun, resourceful, and engaging manner. We even purchased a traveling trophy to be awarded to the school with the most learning targets posted.

Using the PhotoCircle app, teachers from all five campuses uploaded their examples to one shared spot, and we were able to instantly share and comment on one another's learning targets and success criteria. Teachers and principals from all school sites shared learning targets and success criteria with one another.

This transparency among teachers created a safe sharing space to practice new learning in action. Because we followed the same scope and sequence, this allowed for real collaboration. Teachers were initially worried about putting their learning targets and success criteria on display. However, through the use of PhotoCircle, this

daunting request became an engaging way for them to see samples, connect, and check their own understanding.

**Enable ongoing collaboration.** We created systems to guarantee the cross-campus sessions were not a one-and-done learning experience. We used Google Classroom to add professional resources accessible to teachers. This allows teachers to go back and revisit specific information for further support or clarification. Additionally, we will continue to refresh and differentiate as staff needs change and evolve.

### DEEP AND LASTING RELATIONSHIPS

Just as the five of us have developed deep and lasting relationships, working relationships among teachers have evolved into social gatherings and camaraderie. As we move forward and look to sustain and deepen our collaboration, many of our conversations center on continuing to build trust and capacity among our collective sites.

Our model of learning and collaborative leadership was organically built and supported, and this is a culture shift we hope becomes the expectation. We are better principals because of one another, and we believe the same is true of our teachers. After working together as a team, we will never go back to doing this work in isolation.

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# IDEAS

## DON'T FORGET SCHOOL COUNSELORS IN YOUR LEARNING PLANS

**T**oo often, leaders overlook valuable human capital in their schools and miss the opportunity to develop them so that the school and its students can reach their full potential. This is particularly true for a highly qualified but underused group of professionals: school counselors.

School counselors work at the nexus of academic, social and emotional, and post-secondary development. They are uniquely positioned to support students' skills, address barriers to learning, and support schools' strategic priorities.

— p. **50**



# NO COUNSELOR LEFT BEHIND

DON'T OVERLOOK THESE HIGHLY QUALIFIED PROFESSIONALS IN YOUR LEARNING PLANS

BY MANDY SAVITZ-ROMER

If your district or school has developed a strategic plan for professional learning, implements strong coaching and PLCs, and aims to meet the Standards for Professional Learning, you may believe you are covering all the bases to build capacity in your staff. But look more closely. Are you including all the professionals who influence learning and academic success?

Too often, leaders overlook valuable

human capital in their schools and miss the opportunity to develop them so that the school and its students can reach their full potential. This is particularly true for a highly qualified but underused group of professionals: school counselors.

School counselors work at the nexus of academic, social and emotional, and post-secondary development. They are uniquely positioned to support students' skills, address barriers to learning, and support schools' strategic priorities.

However, with growing responsibilities, counselors report needing more knowledge and skills to support students, staff, and families. Initially introduced into schools to provide vocational guidance and post-secondary direction to students, today's school counselors are asked to do much more: to deliver a comprehensive program to support students' academic, social and emotional, and post-secondary development.

Yet professional learning for school counselors is often an afterthought, in

## School counselors are uniquely positioned to support students' skills, address barriers to learning, and support schools' strategic priorities.

stark contrast to a common districtwide commitment to professional learning for teachers. And with limited access to professional conferences, school counselors are left with few opportunities to expand their skills once they enter the field or keep pace with new demands placed on schools.

Making matters more difficult, this gap is occurring at a time when many counselors work under difficult conditions that include exorbitantly high caseloads, ambiguous role descriptions, and overwhelming administrative responsibilities.

Bringing counselors into the fold of high-quality professional learning can lead to more efficiency, consistency, and support for teaching and learning. This means making a commitment to professional learning for counselors and aligning it with larger strategic goals while acknowledging counselors' unique roles, strengths, and needs.

### **LOCATE THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING GAP**

The reasons for counselors' lack of access to professional learning are numerous and varied.

Many counselors are required to attend school-sponsored professional development that has little relevance to the role they are expected to fill. Ask any counselor, and most will describe attending learning experiences focused

on instructional practices and classroom strategies with no effort to connect those strategies to their own work with students.

Finding relevance in these sessions can be particularly difficult when they are conducted at the district level, because counselors' needs vary by school demographics and students' challenges. For example, whereas some counselors need updated learning to support students exploring their sexual identity, others need opportunities that equip them with skills to consult with teachers on implementing positive behavioral interventions or mentoring students to encourage college or careers.

Costs, both financial and opportunity, are also barriers to professional learning for counselors. Many professional learning opportunities sponsored by national organizations are costly and require time away from work. The financial costs of professional learning are especially hard on counselors in rural and urban school communities, whose districts lack funds for counselor attendance.

In many instances, school counselors are not permitted to attend conferences due to concerns by administrators about insufficient funds or not having coverage when counselors are absent. Unlike teachers, counselor absences are not compensated for with

substitutes. This can hinder schools' ability to respond to crises, and, for counselors, it often means that work piles up while they are gone. For these reasons, many counselors don't consider time away for professional learning worthwhile.

Beyond content and access, counselors often experience the outdated sit-and-get or one-and-done model of professional learning, both of which have limited impact on improved practice. This type of learning is further complicated by the fact that even when counselors learn new skills and ways of working, they are limited in their ability to apply their new knowledge because school leaders do not understand or support these practices or have a different set of expectations for how counselors should spend their time.

Together, these factors form a formidable barrier to accessing professional learning. School counselors who do not access professional learning risk languishing in their roles and missing the chance to connect their work to larger school goals. Worse, students miss out on much-needed supports.

### **SET A NEW VISION FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS**

Because school counselors can be a valuable resource to tackle education's most pressing issues, including college

# IDEAS

and career readiness, it is time to invest in counselors' learning. A new approach requires recognizing that the counseling responsibilities of today differ dramatically from the outdated role of yesterday.

School counselors, at all levels, teach study skills that enable students to be successful in classrooms and identify barriers to learning that can be addressed by supplemental supports. Counselors in middle and high schools help students draw connections between classroom learning and future goals. In fact, research has found that when students are clear about a future path for themselves that feels doable and reachable, their academic engagement increases.

School counselors also play a key role in helping students develop social and emotional skills like goal setting, planning, and managing emotions. Importantly, counselors also help students manage family and social stressors so that they can focus in school and achieve their best. All of these supports are vital for student success and, too often, they don't fit into the time or experience of many classroom teachers.

I believe that a new vision for school counseling should draw on the medical home model popularized in health care (Savitz-Romer, 2019). As primary care providers are the first check-in point and coordinate care with specialists, school counselors should be at the center of students' development, providing an academic home and then building on it and leveraging other valuable resources inside and outside of schools.

This approach calls on counselors to act as leaders in schools, creating a web of supports that draw on the contributions of teachers, community partners, families, and students themselves.

## MEET COUNSELORS' PROFESSIONAL NEEDS

This new vision requires an update to professional learning for school counselors, one that takes an ecological

## Counselors in middle and high schools help students draw connections between classroom learning and future goals.

approach to professional learning that includes not just what is covered in learning opportunities, but also who is included and how it is accomplished. School and district leaders can draw on the following models — some of which already exist in their schools — to engage school counselors.

### Data-driven professional learning.

Because counselors' needs vary, it is important for professional learning directors to use surveys to identify what needs are a priority in any given year and align this data with larger school priorities and plans.

Whereas one school might be struggling with social media usage, another might need support identifying signs of suicide. Another school might discover that, although the school has a goal of preparing all students for college, counselors aren't sure how to help students who are struggling in their coursework.

From this data, district leaders can tailor professional learning to both districtwide goals and counselors' unique role and responsibilities. For example, a district concerned with absenteeism might engage counselors in identifying how they can be leveraged to improve students' attendance and engagement. In one school district, counselors proposed a home visit program in which they alternated days of the week to visit homes, while their colleagues covered at school. This initiative not only improved attendance, but also sent a strong signal to the counselors about their value in the district.

**Cross-role teams.** For school counselors to adopt a new approach to their work, their role partners need to better understand the counselor's role and the collaborative relationships

needed to realize it.

Counselors often report poor relationships with leaders, teachers, and other school staff because of general misperceptions of their role. A common refrain counselors hear from their colleagues is, "What do counselors actually do?" Shared professional learning is a great way to clarify these varied roles and forge important relationships.

To accomplish this, schools, districts, and professional organizations should look to cross-role learning opportunities. For example, schools might create cross-role professional learning that brings together counselors and teachers for shared learning on topics of shared interest, such as behavioral interventions and support.

Districts might also host learning experiences that bring together counselors and school leaders to work in partnership to implement changes in their schools. For example, some districts have introduced counselor-principal agreements that set up counselors and school leaders to set school counselors' yearly goals and identify support needed for counselors to meet these goals.

Not only can these professionals collaborate more effectively when they experience learning together, but it helps each role partner understand one another's strengths.

**PLCs.** Just as professional learning communities (PLCs) have been used to engage teachers, they can be used for counselors to facilitate collective inquiry and action research to better support the students they serve (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004). Counselors can be a valuable addition to PLCs with other educators, so that they are supporting larger school goals.

Young, Millard, and Kneale (2013) call for the implementation of school counseling collaborative teams formed by counselors in a given school, counselors from feeder elementary or middle schools working together, counselors from a geographic area, or counselors with a shared interest

in gaining specific skills. This can be an especially useful way to improve the transition between elementary, middle, and high school because the relationships formed among counselors serve as a bridge for students' transitions.

**Engaging professional associations.** Professional organizations also have a vital role to play in closing the learning gap for counselors. Professional organizations targeting different roles (e.g. school principals and school counselors) might host shared learning opportunities that bring together the standards that guide each profession to create collaborative approaches to pressing issues in schools.

Professional organizations that support these role partners can invite school counseling leaders and associations to present at their conferences and participate in ongoing networks to educate their members about the contribution of school counselors.

Professional organizations that provide the majority of learning opportunities for counselors, such as the American School Counselor Association and the National Association for College Admission Counseling, can play a key role in creating this continuity. They could adopt Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning as sustained, job-embedded, and collaborative. These standards could guide coaching models supported by these professional associations as well as other professional learning opportunities and networks they sponsor.

**Structures and systems.** Creating academic homes where counselors can lead collaborative approaches to promoting students' development will depend on new structures and systems to guide that home. Counselors will need help creating the systems and processes to guide an academic home, such as developing memoranda of understanding to manage partnerships or data tools to identify gaps in programming.

## Professional organizations also have a vital role to play in closing the learning gap for counselors.

For counselors whose days can be filled with one immediate crisis after another, professional learning must include time and technical support to create these tools and systems. Much like literacy coaches have been used to help literacy instructors improve their practice, school counselors would benefit from coaching and intermediary support to help them build the systems (e.g. data systems, teams, protocols) that will help an academic home run smoothly. Professional learning directors might also use boot camps and other learning experiences that are focused on deliverables and support counselors' work time.

**External learning opportunities.** Because counselors' work is connected to external partners, including colleges and employers as well as mental health services, it can be valuable for them to engage in professional learning opportunities in those settings, where they can learn firsthand about these settings and collaborate with the professionals who work in them.

For example, high school counselors, who spend a lot of their time educating students about post-high school career and college pathways, can participate in externship programs to learn about the job pathways in their community.

Through visits to colleges and universities, counselors can learn about what colleges are looking for and how the school can prepare students; support programs the universities offer, for example to first-generation college-goers; and their former students' experiences to inform how they prepare current and future students.

For example, one school district gave counselors time off to visit graduates in college. This allowed the counselors to learn more about the

institution through the eyes of one of their graduates so they could help school staff understand what high schoolers really need to know and do to be prepared while also giving the graduate an additional dose of support during a critical transition time.

## INVEST IN COUNSELORS' READINESS

All students should have access to well-trained school counselors who have the skills and knowledge necessary to support the full range of academic, social and emotional, and post-secondary needs. For that to happen, we need to make a firm commitment to supporting counselors' professional learning needs.

If counselors are to provide students an academic home and coordinate the supports of many partners, professional learning will need to be a shared responsibility across schools, districts, and the broader professional learning community.

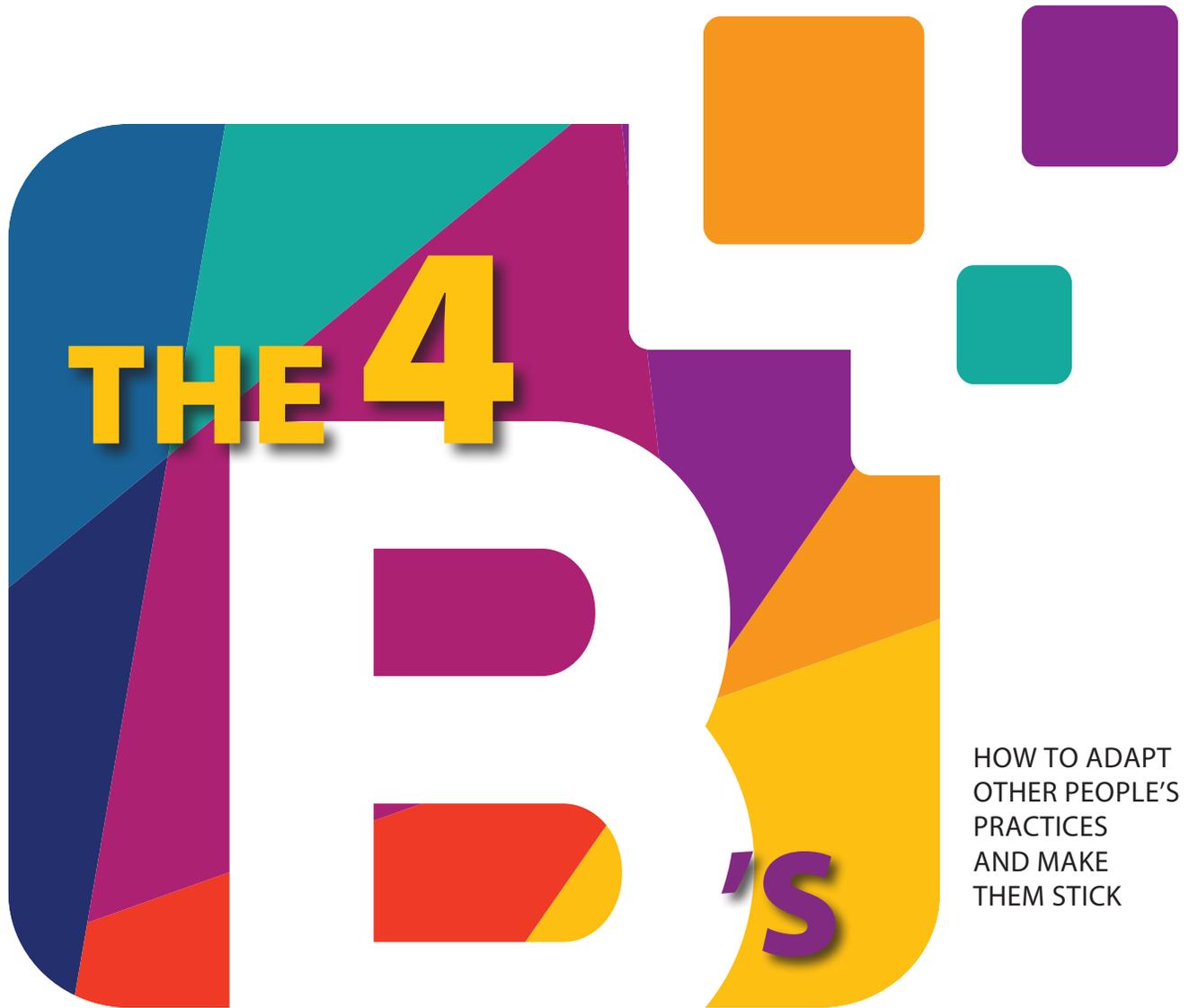
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HOW TO ADAPT  
OTHER PEOPLE'S  
PRACTICES  
AND MAKE  
THEM STICK

BY ANDY HARGREAVES AND MICHAEL T. O'CONNOR

**W**hen we learn about an educational intervention that is inspiring, innovative, or appears effective, we often think our next step is obvious: Take it back to our schools or systems and replicate it. We may be so enchanted by the content of what we've encountered that we just charge ahead, forgetting all the other things we know about the necessary conditions for change, especially when we adopt an

idea from elsewhere. That's when many problems begin.

A practice that is seemingly perfect in someone else's class or school can become a shadow of itself if you try to adopt it exactly as is, without considering your context. Professional learning communities, instructional rounds, learning walks, data teams, peer review, lesson study, and improvement science — you name it, and we'll show you examples of how educators have misapplied them because they did not

understand the conditions that enable success.

Although sometimes this is the result of a desire for a quick fix, more often it is the result of educators' enthusiasm for learning and making a difference. When their efforts fall flat, they can feel crestfallen.

This situation is avoidable, however. Asking probing questions and digging beneath the surface are essential for understanding what makes a particular model of teacher collaboration (or

other innovation) successful. To help educators engage in this kind of thinking, we have developed a model we call the four B's.

### THE FOUR B'S

The four B's framework grew out of our global study of *collaborative professionalism* (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2017, 2018). We define collaborative professionalism as ways educators work together with depth, trust, and precision to achieve impact. We set out to study how it manifests in different cultures and countries.

As we looked across these settings, we found that particular designs for collaborating, like lesson study or teacher-led learning communities, seemed to work brilliantly in one

culture or context but had features that might not work as well or in the same way in other contexts.

What would it take, we wondered, for these strategies to be just as effective elsewhere? What would we need to understand to take a collaborative practice from the Canadian wilderness, the forests of Colombia, the tower blocks of Hong Kong, or the forgotten small towns of rural America and successfully move it into a suburb or inner city? What would educators need to know, above and beyond the specific features of the collaboration method — because what you see isn't self-evidently what you get?

We have summed up what educators need to know about the conditions for success according to four

B's: What was happening *before*, *beside*, *beyond*, and *betwixt* the collaboration. When we encounter and examine any new practice, as well as noting things about the practice itself, we also need to learn what happened:

- *Before* the moment we witnessed it, including the trust that had to be established, how long key leaders had been at the school, and so on;
- *Beside* the innovation, such as funding, policies, priorities, and competing initiatives that supported the innovation, or at least did not undermine it;
- *Beyond* the practice itself, including teachers' and leaders' engagement in additional networks and

THE 4 B'S OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING			
<p><b>BEFORE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How long has the principal or school leader been there?</li> <li>• Did people ever collaborate badly before they collaborated well?</li> <li>• Did the principal lead the learning teams before the teachers did?</li> <li>• Did people collaborate informally before they did so formally? Or vice versa?</li> <li>• Did the present practice evolve through different stages?</li> <li>• What happened to people who were skeptical at first?</li> </ul>	<p><b>BESIDE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the practice relate to current district, state, and federal policies?</li> <li>• How does it fit with other school, district, or system priorities?</li> <li>• What funds have been available for it?</li> <li>• Does it have advocates and ambassadors in the system?</li> <li>• Is the school going it alone, or are other schools participating as well?</li> </ul>	<p><b>BEYOND</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where did the school see or hear about this new practice?</li> <li>• How does the school learn from other schools about this and other innovations?</li> <li>• What networks is the school part of?</li> <li>• Does the school invite people to come and work with it from other schools or universities?</li> <li>• How does the school read or learn about other practices?</li> <li>• What conferences or workshops do teachers go to, and how do they share what they learn with others?</li> </ul>	<p><b>BETWIXT</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do educators collaborate outside this practice, as well as in it?</li> <li>• How do they collaborate after school, outdoors, over lunch, or socially, as well as in this practice?</li> <li>• What does collaboration look like in the culture of the whole society, and how is it similar to or different from your own?</li> </ul>

learning opportunities, and the contribution of resources or policies from provincial, state, or national systems; and

- *Betwixt* the collaborators, in the sense of shared understandings and cultural norms of collaboration (or its absence) in the school, the system, or the whole society.

Let's look at these four B's in action in two different examples of collaborative professionalism.

## COOPERATIVE LEARNING AMONG TEACHERS

Drammen Elementary School in Norway is less than an hour's train ride outside Oslo. When we walked around the schoolyard, we spied a simple but innovative design. Two young girls were sitting on a stone bench. "That's our friendship bench," Principal Lena Killen explained. "If a child has no one to play with, they sit down there and someone else will come and play with them." How beautifully simple. "Why couldn't every school everywhere have one of these?" we thought.

When we got home, an item on U.S. National Public Radio was devoted to this very issue — the introduction of "buddy benches" in American schools (Cimini & Howard, 2017). To our surprise, the reviews were not all positive. In some schools, one commentator noted, buddy benches marked children who sat on them and made them targets for bullying. An anti-bullying invention in Norway could actually incite bullying in the U.S. The bench was the same, but what went on *betwixt* the cultures in each of the two societies was quite different.

If simple benches can have different meanings in different places, this is even more true for complex organizational designs. At Drammen, the school has adopted the cooperative learning strategies of U.S. psychologist Spencer Kagan. Students cooperate in multiple structured ways through carefully designed group processes to pursue

learning and achievement together.

The school uses these strategies not only with the children, but also among the staff. Teachers share and commit to expanding the range of strategies they use in their classes. They get involved in understanding and shaping the big picture of where their school is headed. And they look collaboratively at student achievement data to identify patterns. For example, they found that, contrary to a national trend, the girls were performing less well than the boys.

Sometimes, the staff work in carefully designed subgroups of mixed age, experience, and specialist expertise. At other times, they will snake around the room as if they are in a game of musical chairs until they are signaled to stop and work with whoever happens to be around them. The system seems very impressive, so why shouldn't observers who witness this awesome design go back and implement it in their own schools right away?

Well, the design works in building positive and engaged collaboration not just because it's a brilliant design, but also because of the four B's that surround it:

- *Before* initiating structured cooperative learning, principal Killen had been building collaboration more informally for nine years. Her predecessor had decided everything for the school, right down to choosing the curtains and furnishings. It took time for Killen to get everyone to decide things together.
- *Beyond* her school, staff had learned about cooperative learning by participating in training programs in the United Kingdom and by seeing examples of effective cooperation through school partnerships with Ontario, Canada.
- *Beside* her efforts has been a national government that endorses a broad curriculum, provides data support, and has

an agreement with the teacher unions that includes scheduled collective time for teachers to work together.

- *Betwixt* the formal participation in cooperative learning, the staff has many other ways of collaborating, including eating together. The entire culture of Norwegian schools is also one where teachers and students spend a lot of school time together outdoors in nature in all kinds of weather, even in the depths of winter. This way everyone really gets to know and trust each other, the teachers say.

All of these factors likely impact the effectiveness of the cooperative learning structures in a positive way. If the conditions were different, the implementation and outcomes might be different. Consider, for example, what might happen if the cooperative learning structures were used in a school where there is a new principal, no history of collaboration, no scheduled time to collaborate, or an obsession with standardization and test scores and a lack of time for building relationships outside the building as well as inside it.

## RURAL COLLABORATIVE PLANNING NETWORKS

As another example, consider the four B's in a network we facilitated of rural schools in economically disadvantaged communities. Teacher isolation is a major hindrance to school effectiveness and student achievement, and the problem is especially acute in rural communities. There may be only one teacher per subject or grade level, and staff members feel they have to be a Jack or Jill of all trades. As one teacher we worked with put it, "It's hard to collaborate with yourself."

Over five years, with colleagues from Boston College, we have collaborated with the Northwest Comprehensive Center at Education Northwest to develop a network among

educators in rural and remote schools in five Pacific Northwest states. Many of these communities have high levels of poverty and face other challenges exacerbated by being isolated from other communities and resources.

Because of the unique nature of every rural environment, the problems of educational equity for rural schools cannot be resolved simply by exporting solutions that have worked in urban school reform. So we worked collaboratively with state education agency representatives, then principals and teachers, to co-design and then steer an evolving network that suited rural contexts and that now comprises 32 schools in total (Hargreaves, Parsley, & Cox, 2015).

At the core of the network, teachers plan curriculum collaboratively, twice a year in person and online in between, with job-alike colleagues from other schools. They shared each other's ideas, and they challenged them, too. Teachers were engaged and appreciated the collaboration.

After a while, not only were teachers collaborating, but their students were, as well. Danette Parsley, chief program officer at Education Northwest who played a major role in initiating the network, described how the English language arts group first developed its planning work into a combination of sharing resources and designing some lessons.

"Not too far into it," she said, "they realized, 'Wait a minute. Instead of us just designing lessons together, why not get our kids involved?'" So high school students across schools started to peer review each other's writing, saying that it was actually easier to give honest feedback to students far away than ones who sat next to them in class.

The result was that, according to teachers in the English language arts group, students' writing became more authentic and argumentative as the students debated the pros and cons of using drones in the military or agriculture and presented their assessments of 1:1 devices in schools to

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local politicians.

As one student reported, he made intentional language choices in his writing when directed to the state representative on a topic he cared about because "I thought I could be heard." Teachers weren't isolated anymore, and students had their eyes opened to a world beyond their own community.

The network was really buzzing and continues to thrive. So why wouldn't another system or other project leaders want to come in and copy it exactly as it is? Well, if they did, in addition to describing how the network has been designed, we'd also need to explain to them that:

- *Before* the network functioned this way, it had evolved carefully, collaboratively, and inclusively over five years. It wasn't a club of like-thinking schools with a badge, a brand, and an annual conference they could instantly sign up for. And it wasn't a top-down bunch of regional clusters created

by a state bureaucracy to get its mandates and standards implemented. They couldn't just copy our network. They'd have to evolve their own.

- *Beyond* the other schools in the network, participants also had the opportunity to engage with us (from the Northwest Comprehensive Center at Education Northwest and Boston College) and learn from our experience designing and evaluating networks in other systems and countries. They had listened to and engaged with keynote speakers who had come to their twice-yearly meetings to disrupt their thinking and shake up their ideas. And they had engaged with teachers from other networks in the U.S. and Canada who came to talk about their own networks and their impact. These schools and teachers therefore drew on multiple examples in co-designing their own network.
- *Beside* the network were representatives of the states who gently ensured that network activities meshed with state standards. They encouraged teachers to see the Common Core State Standards as an opportunity, a common cross-state learning touchstone, that could help to drive collaboration, and teachers responded once they saw this potential value. Because of this integration, they actively supported the development of the network and its efforts to increase student engagement over time.
- *Between* the network was a culture of rural educators who wanted to help their students succeed and increase opportunities for all of them. But rather than just getting caught up in idealistic bold

*Continued on p. 62*



## PUT LEARNING IN HIGH GEAR

COHERENCE  
ACCELERATES  
LITERACY  
CURRICULUM  
GOALS

BY JEREMY AVINS, NATHAN HUTTNER, AND SHERRILL C. MILLER

In 2016, the Wake County Public School System in North Carolina, the nation's 15th-largest school district, confronted two dilemmas common in U.S. education.

First, a quality review had revealed weaknesses in its literacy curriculum. Although curriculum can have profound effects on student learning, not all curricula are rigorous and engaging (Steiner, 2017).

Second, Wake struggled with professional learning for new literacy standards and practice shifts. Research has found that teaching expertise is the most important factor in school effectiveness, but few teachers believe their professional learning is effective

(Wiener & Pimentel, 2017; TNTTP, 2015).

To address these difficulties, Wake adopted EL Education's open-source 3-8 language arts instructional model. This model integrates a standards-aligned curriculum aimed at challenging, engaging, and empowering students with paced assessments, detailed teacher resources, and an embedded professional learning approach.

The result — if implemented well — is a coherent approach to instruction that Kathy Toma, Wake's senior administrator for middle school English language arts, calls "a paradigm shift in pedagogy."

Given the transition's scope, Wake

planned to phase it in over three years, adding two grade levels each year. Yet after several months, eight in 10 teachers believed the materials advanced the district's instructional vision effectively (Brown, 2019). Things were going so well for students that district leaders knew they couldn't wait to expand implementation, says EL Education's Wendy Hodgson.

Educators in the district were excited by students' engagement in English language arts classes. Building on this excitement and lessons learned, Wake expanded EL Education's model from 3rd and 6th grade to all grades 3-8 in 2018-19 — a year ahead of schedule.

Wake's experiences — and

their similarities with those of four other districts whose approaches we examined — blaze a trail for other districts seeking to accelerate teacher development and student success. This trail can lead to powerful results but requires a thoughtful approach to material adoption, implementation, and teacher professional learning.

### AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

EL Education’s model, like others that embody college- and career-ready standards such as Illustrative Mathematics and Core Knowledge, reflects an ongoing evolution in the field.

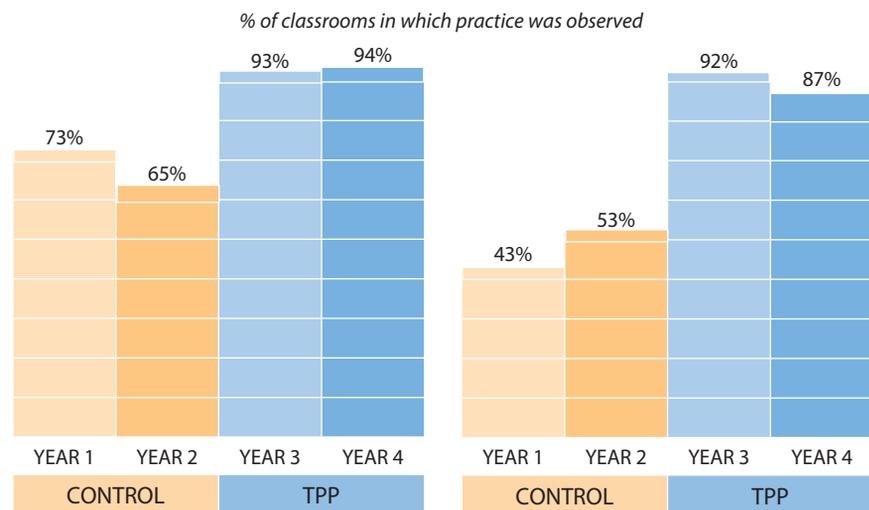
Curricula, assessments, and professional learning have long been important. But despite decades of research urging alignment, they have generally been pursued independently. Now, there’s a growing push to integrate them as a coherent approach that involves and empowers teachers from the start.

The materials reflect this shift. In many curricula, most content is student-facing. In these models, estimates EL Education’s CEO Scott Hartl, up to 80% of materials are teacher-facing and aim to support teacher learning. The idea is that teachers develop knowledge that improves pedagogy as they use the materials, sometimes called educative materials.

For example, EL Education’s phonetics lesson guides explain how reading and spelling tasks are designed to mutually reinforce students’ development of each skill. Yet according to a 2017 review, “Educative curriculum features can support change in teacher practice, but if the educative features are part of a professional

### TEACHER USE OF BEST PRACTICES

Teachers in EL’s Teacher Potential Project made more use of best practices than teachers in a control group.



Teachers regularly had students write citing evidence or information from a text they had read.

Students sometimes or often engaged in higher-order thinking.

Source: Choi, Richman, & Dolfin, 2018.

learning system in which the parts work synergistically, the impact can be greater” (Krajcik & Delen, 2017).

The results of coherence can be impressive. A randomized trial found that EL Education’s Teacher Potential Project, which matches materials with materials-aligned professional learning, significantly improved teaching practices within one year, with sustained gains compared to a control group that did not participate in the program (see chart above) (Choi, Richman, & Dolfin, 2018).

Of course, impact also depends on execution. The nonprofit Instruction Partners surveyed curriculum implementations and found that implementation is easy to do poorly — especially if there is insufficient

attention to planning — and often leads to great frustration.

Districts are finding that success with aligned materials and professional learning requires rethinking standard procedures. With support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, a team from Redstone Strategy Group investigated the experiences of several districts that are early adopters of coherent models like EL Education (a Kellogg grantee).

These districts’ experience with coherence remains nascent and continues to evolve. Nonetheless, structured interviews with district leaders, providers of materials and instructional supports, and on-the-ground implementers — alongside a review of district outcomes and available research — helped illuminate

the benefits, challenges, and key ingredients of crafting coherence.

As two districts' efforts from early literacy through 8th grade show, the transformation begins even before deciding which materials to adopt.

## WAKE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM, NORTH CAROLINA

Brian Kingsley faced a quandary. Soon after he arrived in Wake as assistant superintendent of academics in 2015, the district discovered what he called a glaring gap between “what teachers were using, what they had access to, and what was truly standards-aligned and rigorous” (Brown, 2019).

Change would require strenuous effort. Wake has over 110,000 K-8 students in 144 schools. Encompassing Raleigh and spreading nearly to Durham, this district is socioeconomically and racially diverse. It includes some of the state's wealthiest neighborhoods, but more than 30% of students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch (Wake County Public School System, 2018).

Traditionally, in curriculum adoption years, Wake's leadership released a standard request for proposals for new curricula and invited 10 vendors to give 30-minute presentations. Reviewers scored the vendors on a simple rubric and voted.

In 2015, Wake upended that status quo. Before drafting a request for proposals for grades 3-8 language arts materials, a team of district staff developed an evidence-based instructional vision — achieving 95% college and career readiness by emphasizing creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication — and adapted Student Achievement Partners' standards-aligned Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool to that vision.

After spending over 100 hours assessing materials that claimed standards alignment — including open educational resources — Wake hosted community input sessions for three finalists while teaching teams field-

tested them for three to four weeks.

Finally, in May 2016, the team recommended adoption of EL Education's materials, whose approach to student engagement and teacher practice fit Wake's vision nicely. Even then, though, the district's pace was measured. Despite the sense of urgency, Wake paced implementation to allow time to identify successes and barriers and build district-level capacity to lead training.

## EAST RAMAPO CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT, NEW YORK

Also in 2015, in New York's East Ramapo Central School District, Deborah Wortham began as superintendent in another complex setting. Sixty-eight percent of her district's students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch, and 29% are English learners (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

When Wortham arrived, only 15% of students achieved reading proficiency and the community had been rocked by funding conflicts that cut 445 positions and led to state intervention (Taylor, 2015).

Wortham arrived with plenty to do — “everything is first,” she told reporters — but she viewed a coherent vision and mission as crucial. A mission “helps you decide how you act,” she says (Kramer, 2015). The district's leadership spent much of 2016 gathering input from stakeholders to craft the mission statement — “educating the whole child by providing a healthy, safe, supportive, engaging, and challenging learning environment” — and develop a strategic plan for academic success.

As Wortham explains, East Ramapo's leadership “begins and ends with, *Is it good for kids?* Our approach to education is holistic. ... We educate the whole child.” Consequently, the plan centers on five goals, beginning with social, emotional, and academic readiness in K-2 and building toward college and career readiness by high school graduation.

Like Wake, East Ramapo

chose EL Education for its match with the district's vision. Natasha McVea, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, explains that the integrated curriculum aligned seamlessly to the district's vision of proficiency and coherent approach to academic achievement. Christina Lesh, EL Education's regional director, was struck by East Ramapo's approach. “They had a very solid strategic plan and had brought together teachers and leaders to cultivate it with the board and community,” she says. “They ensured that that vision was embedded in the materials.”

## ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

The districts applied several shared elements that appear to have been crucial in their successful transition to the new materials.

### *A high-capacity implementation team*

A dedicated, high-capacity team including diverse content leaders can provide prompt, targeted support when schools encounter challenges with new materials and provide continuity through any leadership changes.

At Wake, teams representing both elementary and middle schools across eight areas, from general education English language arts to special education to Title I, meet weekly to discuss questions and needs related to implementing the EL Education curriculum.

Their broad representation is the district's biggest leverage point, says former literacy lead Shanta Lightfoot. “It was really helpful in building buy-in and strengthening implementation,” she says. Shawn Johnson, senior administrator for elementary English language arts, adds, “The team is essential to moving this work forward. If not for them, we'd be in a different place.”

A team approach also is vital in East Ramapo. Superintendent Wortham says, “A significant component of our practice is the collective effort of district-level administrators in

our school improvement process.” Her cabinet accompanies coaches on learning walks to provide actionable feedback to teachers and school building leaders, reinforcing coherence in implementation from the classroom to district central office.

*Collaborative planning with partners*

Meanwhile, both districts built collaborative relationships with EL Education to support high-quality professional learning. The Wake team describes the approach as shifting from a vendor to partner relationship. East Ramapo and EL Education staff developed several implementation options together and provided intensive, classroom-level support — especially for early literacy teachers whose work sets the foundation for students’ ongoing success.

Likewise, EL Education and Wake collaborate to monitor progress in both implementation and student outcomes and adjust as needed. As one administrator told us, “We share with EL what we need based on teacher and administrator feedback. It isn’t just canned trainings. To me, that’s a real partnership.”

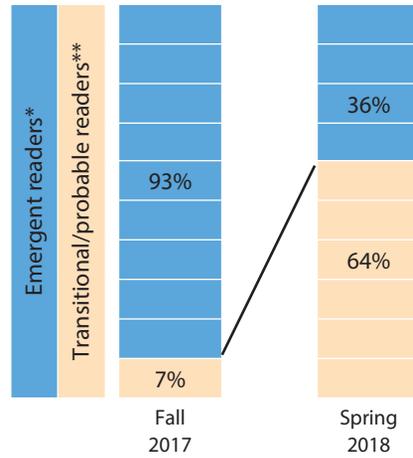
*Frequent and aligned professional learning*

Professional learning should not be a one-time event, but an ongoing process through which teachers deepen their understanding of the materials. As one professional learning expert with whom we spoke explained, teachers should not apply a curriculum like EL Education’s robotically. Instead, they must internalize a curriculum’s meaning to make decisions with agility.

Chong-Hao Fu, CEO of Leading Educators (a curriculum-specific professional learning design organization), explains that just as doctors aren’t expected to invent a new procedure to do open heart surgery, teachers shouldn’t have to design lessons from scratch. Instead, they can apply professional judgment to differentiate instruction, drawing

**LITERACY GAINS IN EAST RAMAPO**

Percent of 2nd graders at each reading proficiency level at the beginning and end of the first year implementing EL Education’s K-2 skills block.



\*STAR assessment score = 300-674

\*\* Score = 675-900

Source: Wortham, D. (2018). *East Ramapo Central School District: 2017-2018 review of the district academic strategic plan*. Oakland, CA: Performance Fact.

from evidence-based practices to meet students’ needs.

“There isn’t a Platonic ideal lesson that exists outside of the relationship between teachers and students,” says Fu. “Teachers inevitably must make decisions to respond to their students. The question is, how do we help them do so skillfully?”

The answer, these districts have found, is to provide materials-aligned, interactive professional learning early and often. In Wake and East Ramapo, EL Education provides professional learning linked to the curriculum, steadily building teacher leaders’ capacity so that over time, the district can provide all implementation supports internally. Job-embedded coaching in East Ramapo uses a collaborative, data-driven planning process to implement the curriculum, says McVea.

Ogechi Iwuoha, East Ramapo’s assistant superintendent for professional learning, says teachers have protected time to plan and practice collaboratively and use the curriculum to strengthen

pedagogical content knowledge. Iwuoha says the professional learning that EL Education and district staff provide together uses the materials to connect professional practices described in the strategic plan to the classroom experience of students and teachers. It also is paced to coincide with module assessments.

*Professional learning for leaders*

Both districts emphasize professional learning for school leaders, too. When principals in Wake requested extra support, the district implementation team created forums for principals to problem-solve collaboratively. East Ramapo combines classroom walk-throughs with learning sessions rooted in content and pedagogy. “Leadership professional learning removed from what teachers are teaching isn’t helpful,” says Lesh, noting that it must be consistent with teachers’ experience.

In other words, ongoing professional learning is essential to the instructional vision that led the districts to select coherent models.

*Persistence*

Wake’s internal data show increased growth among the lowest-performing students, giving the district hope that disparities between subgroups will narrow. “It doesn’t happen overnight,” says Johnson. “As we begin to see students feeling successful and being successful [with the curriculum], it has changed our teachers’ mindsets.”

Preliminary results from East Ramapo’s district tests at the end of the first year using EL Education also are heartening, especially in the early literacy-focused K-2 skills block (see chart above). Still, everyone involved in East Ramapo cautions that districtwide improvements may require two to three years.

For now, other indicators provide ample encouragement. As one teacher commented after a recent professional learning session, “You may feel like [this model] is out of reach for your kids, but give it a chance.” Why?

# IDEAS

Because, as the teacher put it, “This curriculum is teaching me just as much as it’s teaching my kids.”

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## The 4 B's

*Continued from p. 57*

visions, teachers knew they had to do the hard work of creating engaging, relevant learning opportunities, and that they had to view their rural environments and cultures as opportunities and assets, not only or mainly as deficits.

If anyone looked at a snapshot of the network and missed all that happened to bring it to this point or all the things going on behind the scenes, they might have tried to adopt the model in another setting with little success. For example, if school leaders set up the operations for a new network, failing to understand that teachers in our network had co-constructed it, they might have failed to build professional investment and incurred teachers’ disapproval later on.

Organizations shouldn’t have to reinvent the wheel. But most will have to invent or adapt their own kinds of wheels that best fit their own terrain, mindful of the other kinds of wheels that are already around.

## BE ALERT

Being alert to the four B’s may

make all the difference when you are working to adopt a new practice in your own school. If you look at lesson study in East Asia, as we did in Hong Kong, expect that interactions will be much more formal, structured, and even strict than in the U.S. or Canada, for instance.

And if you watch teachers collaborate in rural Colombia, you need to see that animated political, professional, and social conversations are all intertwined with each other, in ways that may not mesh so easily with cultures elsewhere.

As you engage with and then reflect on new practices and how they might work for you, consider the guiding questions in the figure on p. 55. Engage with these four B’s of professional learning and you will understand and implement everything you try to adopt and adapt with greater depth and more success because it will fit your own culture and community.

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Discuss. Collaborate. Facilitate.

# TOOLS

## PLCs CAN GET STUCK

**P**rofessional learning communities (PLCs) can encounter obstacles or plateau as a result of five common challenges: incoherence, insularity, unequal participation, congeniality, and privacy. Fortunately, teachers and the administrators who support them can overcome these obstacles with self-reflection and intentionality.

The tool on pp. **64-68** provides discussion questions to help PLC members and facilitators reflect on these challenges and address them in their own work.

# OVERCOME 5 PLC CHALLENGES

BY THOMAS H. LEVINE

PLCs can get stuck. Research supports the contention that professional learning communities (PLCs) are a “path to change in the classroom” (DuFour, 1997). Teachers treading this path, however, can encounter obstacles or plateau as a result of five common challenges: incoherence, insularity, unequal participation, congeniality, and privacy.

Fortunately, teachers and the administrators who support them can overcome these obstacles with self-reflection and intentionality. Here, I describe how these five challenges play out in schools. The tool on pp. 66-68 provides discussion questions to help PLC members and facilitators reflect on these challenges and address them in their own work.

## **CHALLENGE 1: PROMOTE COHERENCE AND FOLLOW-THROUGH.**

Traditional professional development is often too episodic and incoherent to impact teachers. Most teachers have experienced one-shot presentations from experts they’ll never see again on a topic they will never address again.

PLCs provide an alternative to this pattern. However, they do not automatically create more coherent and connected opportunities for teacher learning.

For example, at one California high school, teachers and principals

engaged in Critical Friends Groups that demonstrated sophisticated use of discussion protocols. Teachers reflected on their own work and openly shared their teaching practices and dilemmas (Curry, 2008).

But because teachers chose the focus of each protocol-guided discussion, their conversations were broad-ranging and prevented sustained exploration of any one issue (Curry, 2008). Teachers never got to revisit past conversations or learn from colleagues’ efforts to change their instruction.

## **CHALLENGE 2: OVERCOME INSULARITY TO ENSURE NEW INPUT.**

Continually meeting with the same group of colleagues can create good outcomes — like trust and shared routines — but it can also produce group-think. For example, in one of the Critical Friends Groups described previously, teachers developed “a privileged repertoire of oft-repeated instructional suggestions” (Curry, 2003, p. 257) that amounted to “self-evident pedagogic strategies” (Curry, 2003, p. 268) that limited innovative thinking. The group’s way of referencing favored pedagogies and buzzwords seemed to reinforce rather than challenge assumptions.

## **CHALLENGE 3: ENSURE EQUAL PARTICIPATION AND MAXIMAL LEARNING.**

In our classrooms, many teachers

want to equalize and maximize student participation because students who participate achieve deeper, more lasting learning and because classrooms are richer when we hear all voices. The same is true in our work with colleagues. PLCs where all of the members raise questions, offer their interpretation of data, or share advice create the most opportunities for everyone to learn.

In some PLCs, some participants rarely speak. In some PLCs, new teachers are told that in “your first year, don’t say anything, just sit there and be quiet” (Levine et al., 2015). In other PLCs, individuals are quiet because they are shy by nature or don’t yet feel safe taking the risks involved in making their thoughts and teaching public. Some teachers may limit their PLC participation because they don’t see how their contributions will benefit them or others.

## **CHALLENGE 4: MOVE PAST CONGENIALITY.**

Most teachers are cordial and caring with each other. That can be good, producing comfort, solidarity, and trust. But it can also be a problem. A culture of niceness limits growth if teachers don’t also agree to give each other appropriate moments — and degrees — of candor (Evans, 2012).

Many of us find it easier to avoid exploring moments of disagreement or conflict, especially if a teacher’s starting premise is that we are all free to teach

as we want and that it is not our role to challenge each another. However, PLCs thrive when we take responsibility for helping each other learn and improve.

Indeed, effective PLCs are premised on the notion that we will promote more student success if we align our work with one another's and with the priority initiatives in our school and district.

At one Washington state high school, 24 colleagues — mostly English and social studies teachers — discovered the benefits of open disagreement during their monthly meetings to develop interdisciplinary humanities curriculum (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001).

At first, they maintained the kind of surface harmony that typify the way many teachers get along (Achinstein, 2002). As their intensive work raised long-submerged differences and disagreements, the teachers rolled their eyes and ridiculed one another privately, yet the teachers would not address their tensions openly with each other.

In the end, they tolerated more open conflict and found value in their differing views. Their movement from a superficial “pseudo-community” to more authentic engagement with each other helped them produce interdisciplinary curriculum and achieve insights they could not have gained on their own (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001).

#### **CHALLENGE 5:**

##### DEPRIVATIZE PRACTICE.

Many teachers have gotten used to having the privacy and autonomy to teach the way they want, with little input from others. This culture of teacher isolation has made it hard to see alternatives and invite colleagues to offer help.

One 9th-grade team of teachers in California intentionally broke these

norms of privacy while creating a small school within their comprehensive high school. They set up a structure for daily teacher collaboration among a grade-level team. This gave them time to learn with and from each other in several ways.

For example, on Mondays, they shared data about attendance and student achievement to gain insights about how students were doing academically across classes. On Thursdays, they used discussion protocols to examine their teaching (Levine & Marcus, 2010) and plan for changes in their instruction. The protocols nudged colleagues to get involved in collaboratively solving problems with their peers.

#### **GIVE YOUR WORK GREATER IMPACT**

The challenges identified above emerged from research that I and others have done while watching teacher communities closely over long periods of time. PLCs can address these challenges by using the reflection tool on the following pages.

Use the tool to consider and discuss ways you could be creating even more learning for each other and, thus, for your students. I know personally that this work can be ego-threatening in the short term. But it is well worth the temporary discomfort.

You invest much time and energy in your PLC throughout a year. Help each other consider ways to give your work greater impact. Be gentle, supportive, and celebratory of each other as you agree to take more risks.

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## 5 PLC CHALLENGES: A REFLECTION TOOL

### INSTRUCTIONS

For each of the five challenges, reflect on the key question. Use the “for consideration and discussion” questions to scaffold your thinking and discussions. Record your response as notes, bullet points, free writing, or any other format that works for you. Whenever possible, include specific examples.

PLC members should reflect individually first and then discuss their reactions as a group. As a team, explore possible action steps for overcoming one or more of the challenges and make a plan to hold one another accountable for the action steps.

<b>CHALLENGE 1: PROMOTE COHERENCE AND FOLLOW-THROUGH.</b> Key question: Do we structure our work together to promote coherence, follow-up, and focused learning across meetings?	
<b>CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Does what we do and talk about together in our PLC allow for sustained attention to one or two focused issues? Or does it instead encourage attention to many issues?</li><li>• Do we build on our prior work together?</li><li>• Do we hold each other accountable for bringing the insights of our collaborative work into our teaching?</li><li>• Do we bring experiments and data from our teaching back into our PLC?</li><li>• What routines or structures might help us maintain focus and follow-through?</li></ul>	

## 5 PLC CHALLENGES: A REFLECTION TOOL, CONTINUED

### **CHALLENGE 2:** OVERCOME INSULARITY TO ENSURE NEW INPUT.

Key question: Does our PLC promote or limit our access to new ideas?

#### **CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:**

- How did the members of the PLC come together?
- Who is not at the table who could or should be?
- Are there opportunities to involve other staff (e.g. counselors, reading specialists, instructional coaches) or community members (e.g. parents) in some or all of our meetings? Would they be able to attend in person, or do we need another method such as videoconferencing?
- How can we use more readings (e.g. articles, reports, books) to expand our thinking and improve teaching and learning?

### **CHALLENGE 3:** ENSURE EQUAL PARTICIPATION AND MAXIMAL LEARNING.

Key question: Who speaks? Who benefits?

#### **CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:**

- Are there teachers who sometimes dominate conversation in PLC meetings?
- Are there teachers who tend to keep quiet in our group?
- Does our school encourage or discourage its newest members to share their questions and insights?
- What might we do to maximize all of our ability to contribute to and gain from our joint work?

## 5 PLC CHALLENGES: A REFLECTION TOOL, CONTINUED

### **CHALLENGE 4:** MOVE PAST CONGENIALITY.

Key question: Where does our work fall on a continuum between maintaining surface harmony and openly exploring differing ideas?

#### **CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:**

- Do we notice and give voice to moments when we have different views of how to teach something or how best to work with a student?
- Do we intentionally explore differences in our teaching practices to create the potential to improve our teaching?
- Do the culture and climate of the PLC encourage honest and respectful dialogue? If not, what norms could we create to encourage safety and trust?
- What resources and activities could help us explore our differences in belief and practice (e.g. readings, discussion protocols, case studies)?

### **CHALLENGE 5:** DEPRIVATIZE PRACTICE.

Key question: How clearly do we allow others to see our teaching and the evidence of our students' learning?

#### **CONSIDER AND DISCUSS:**

- Has our group fallen into any routines that get useful things done, but which have diminishing returns for our learning and growth?
- What activities could we add to help us learn from our actual work of teaching content, assessing outcomes, and working with specific students?
- Do we articulate what we do in the PLC and why?
- Could we bring artifacts from our teaching or student work to PLC colleagues to help them both learn from our strengths and help us see possible improvements?

# CLASSICS



## LOOKING BACK, LEARNING FORWARD

As Learning Forward celebrates its 50th anniversary, we're digging into our archives to bring you articles that have had a major impact on the field along with commentary from current Learning Forward staff and consultants. The esteemed contributors whose work we've selected have built a foundation of knowledge that undergirds all of our work. We encourage you to revisit their insights to stay grounded even as you push forward.

**IN THIS ISSUE, Tracy Crow, Learning Forward's director of communications, revisits an article written by Dennis Sparks, executive director emeritus of NSDC (now Learning Forward):**

**“W**hen I first read ‘The Final 2%’ in 2005, I was transitioning to a new role at NSDC, with greater responsibility for content development and messaging. Two ideas from the article continue to linger in my work.



Tracy Crow

“First, much of what happens related to professional learning — for example, transforming policies and allocating resources — is merely a prelude, as Sparks writes, to meaningful learning. They are necessary but not sufficient for changing classroom practices. This prompted me to wonder how Learning Forward could profoundly influence what teachers experience while also shaping the professional learning continuum in ways that make those adult learners more central to the whole enterprise.

“Second, if leaders don't commit to the difficult work of articulating their point of view, they can't lead change for others or themselves. Sparks embodies this kind of clarity in the article featured here and in every communication and interaction. This idea of clarity is central to change and continues to resonate in every example of positive leadership we publish.”

— *The final 2%* p. **70**

# THE FINAL

# 20%

WHAT IT TAKES TO CREATE PROFOUND  
CHANGE IN LEADERS



BY DENNIS SPARKS

**M**y work in the field of staff development for the past 25 years has revealed to me deep feelings of discontent among countless teachers, administrators, and policymakers regarding the quality of professional learning in schools. Many educational leaders from the schoolhouse to the statehouse are frustrated with the glacially slow pace of change in this critically important area.

The positive side of such frustration, though, is the energy it generates for deep and significant change in professional learning in schools and a recognition at all levels that if we continue to do what we have always done, we will get what we have always gotten. Leaders are

challenging entrenched thinking about staff development practices that for far too long have ill-served teachers and their students.

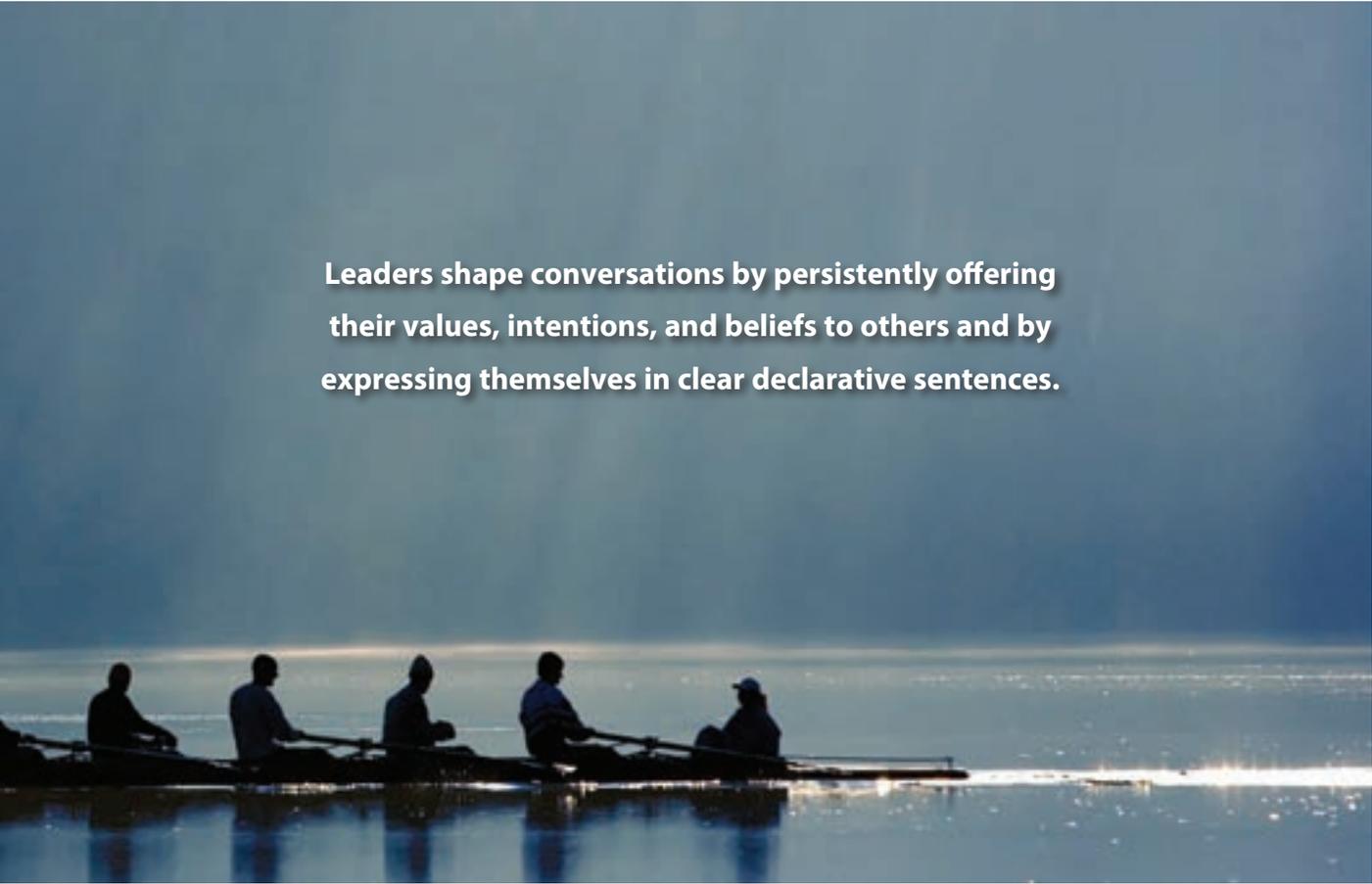
High-quality professional learning is essential if school reform efforts are to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Successful professional learning communities clearly demonstrate what is possible when teachers learn and collaborate within their schools as part of their daily work. Well-implemented professional learning communities are a powerful means of seamlessly blending teaching and professional learning in ways that produce complex, intelligent behavior in all teachers.

David Perkins (2004) lists four “knowledge arts” that he would like schools to cultivate in students

that are in tune with the goals of professional learning communities: creating knowledge, communicating knowledge, organizing knowledge, and acting on knowledge. Professional learning communities extend the “knowledge arts” to teachers: Teachers create knowledge about teaching and learning, communicate it to one another, organize it within themselves and for others to make it more meaningful and accessible, and act on that knowledge for the purpose of improving student learning.

## LEADERS MATTER

Leaders matter in the creation and long-term maintenance of professional learning communities. The quality of teaching, learning, and relationships in professional



**Leaders shape conversations by persistently offering their values, intentions, and beliefs to others and by expressing themselves in clear declarative sentences.**

learning communities depends on the quality of leadership provided by principals and teachers. Leaders matter because they have the authority to shape conversations — what is talked about and how it is talked about — through “Teachable Points of View” and “Interactive Teaching” that lead to essential professional learning.

Leaders shape conversations by persistently offering their values, intentions, and beliefs to others and by expressing themselves in clear declarative sentences. Leaders also matter because they, along with others, shape a school or school system’s structure and culture in ways that promote

learning, collaboration, and environments in which all members of the community feel cared for and respected.

Profound change in schools, I believe, begins with profound change in leaders that radiates out to others and into the system. Structural change is almost always required, but it is not sufficient. New positions can be created, job descriptions rewritten, and teaching schedules modified — to name just a few structural changes — without deeply affecting teachers’ understanding of what they teach, the ways in which they teach it, or their relationships with one another and with their students.

Profound change in leaders results from and is revealed through deeper understanding of complex issues related to professional learning communities, beliefs that are aligned with quality teaching and high levels of learning for all students, and “next action thinking” that moves learning into action and sustains the momentum of change over time. As a result of their professional learning, leaders alter what they think, say, and do in ways that are observable to others. Put another way, profound professional learning produces teachers and administrators who say what they have not said, believe what they have not believed, understand what they have not understood, and

Reprinted from *JSD*, Spring 2005, Vol. 26, No. 2. Dennis Sparks is emeritus executive director of NSDC (now Learning Forward). Issue theme: Leadership at the school level.

## AN EXAMPLE OF A 'TEACHABLE POINT OF VIEW'

Here's an example of a "teachable point of view" I might use at staff meetings if I were a principal.

Over time, a principal might create additional TPOVs for each of the **boldface** words or phrases. The TPOVs would be of different lengths and levels of complexity depending on the purpose (to inform the school community, to engage teachers in dialogue on important issues, etc.) and audience (teachers, parents, or students). They might be spoken or distributed in written form through newsletters, websites or other means of communication. With experience, leaders would create more nuanced and complex TPOVs reflecting a variety of subjects.

**I** believe the quality of our teaching is the most important thing in determining the quality of learning students experience in this school. I believe that the quality of relationships that we as adults have with one another has a profound effect on the quality of relationships students experience here, both with us and with other students. I want every student to experience **quality teaching** in every classroom and be surrounded and supported by **quality relationships** with adults and peers.

"It may be helpful for me to be more specific about some of my beliefs related to teaching and learning. I believe that **beginning teachers benefit from the practical, day-to-day support of other teachers**. I believe that the most **powerful forms of professional learning** occur as part of what teachers do every day rather than separate from it. The daily tasks of teaching — planning lessons, figuring out how to reach and teach hard-to-teach kids, and communicating with parents, to name a few — are sources of vital teamwork and continuous

learning for teachers.

"I believe these things in part because of the professional literature we have been studying together over the past year. I also hold these beliefs because as a beginning teacher I had the good fortune to work at a high school in which I was assigned to two teaching teams that met several times a week. We planned our lessons together and watched one another teach. We gave each other feedback, although it was rudimentary. In addition, a mentor guided me during my first year in the classroom.

"While I am grateful for those experiences, in retrospect I know that they could have been even more powerful. My teaching colleagues and I did not have a very **extensive intellectual framework or vocabulary to talk about our teaching** so we did not always know how to describe what we were doing and how to improve it. We did not know about rubrics and missed the insights they would have provided regarding the quality of student work and the guidance they would have

offered us and our students. We did not have any **sources of data or other evidence of student learning** beyond scores on teacher-made tests and student papers. My mentor, while well-intentioned, was not clear about his responsibilities, and because he had not been trained for this role, I floundered more than was necessary.

"We are on the right track. We already use several types of data to determine our school and team goals and to measure progress. We have formed ourselves into teams, have developed rubrics that we use with our students, and apply research on effective teaching in various subject areas to help us talk to one another about good teaching. To inform our planning, we've been reading about mentoring, lesson study, and using **protocols** to inform our discussions of student work.

"I am confident we can use all these tools and others to find even better ways to serve our students and one another."

— Dennis Sparks

do what they have not done. Without change in those vital areas, I believe that very little of substance will change in ways that improve teaching and student learning.

Leaders can alter what they think, say, and do to address what I believe are the most fundamental barriers to professional learning communities so that what I have termed the final 2% of professional learning occurs. The primary

means for leaders' ongoing learning is their development of "Teachable Points of View" and their engagement of members of the school community in dialogue regarding their views.

### THE "FINAL 2%"

Of all the things said and done at the national, state, and local level to improve the quality of professional learning and collaboration in schools,

only a handful directly affect what teachers learn and how well they work together. Imagine a set of events and activities along a continuum that leads to high-quality professional learning that improves teaching and increases student achievement. On the left side of the continuum are federal, state, and district policies and regulations that are intended to affect professional development. In the middle of the

continuum are structural changes and planning decisions regarding school improvement goals, strategies, and evaluation processes. All of these activities — state and federal legislation, board and administrative policies, structural changes, the reallocation of resources, and district and school improvement planning, to name a few — are merely preludes to the activities that actually produce the professional learning (knowledge, skills, beliefs), collaborative relationships, and improved practice that are their intended goal. Expressed another way, while schools may declare themselves professional learning communities, alter their schedules to enable teams of teachers to meet on a regular basis, and allocate resources to teacher leadership positions such as mentors or academic coaches, these activities are insufficient unless the final 2% of activities are carefully considered and well-executed on a day-to-day basis.

The final 2% is that cluster of experiences that literally change the brains of teachers and administrators. Educators have these experiences that literally change the brains of teachers and administrators. Educators have these experiences when they read, write, observe, use various thinking strategies, listen, speak, and practice new behaviors in ways that deepen understanding, affect beliefs, produce new habits of mind and behavior, and are combined in ways that alter practice. Such professional learning produces complex, intelligent behavior in all teachers and leaders and continuously enhances their professional judgment.

The professional learning activities themselves that comprise the final 2% can take many forms, some familiar and others less familiar to most teachers. The more familiar forms are designed a lot like a classroom — someone (a teacher, administrator, professor, or consultant) teaches teachers in a group setting. Optimally, this design uses methods that align with the school or school system's sense of good teaching.

For instance, Paul Black, Christine Harrison, Clare Lee, Bethan Marshall, and Dylan Wiliam (2004) offer their view of effective teaching by describing generic teaching strategies that if consistently applied “would raise a school in the lower quartile of the national performance tables to well above average” (p. 11). They mention procedures such as allowing students a longer wait time to move student responses from brief, factual answers to extended statements and to engage more students in discussions; providing students with comments on written and oral responses rather than through numerical scores or letter grades; and using peer- and self-assessment to promote deeper learning. Teachers who learned about these research findings, the authors report, “built up a repertoire of generic skills. They planned their questions, allowed appropriate wait time, and gave feedback that was designed to cause thinking. They ensured that students were given enough time during lessons to evaluate their own work and that of others” (p. 16).

Drawing on the perspectives offered by other types of research, Jacqueline Grennon Brooks (2004) cites cognitive science and neuropsychological brain studies as a source of guidance on deepening student understanding and increasing motivation. She recommends practices such as seeking and valuing student points of view, one-minute writing exercises for students to increase their conceptual understanding, and problem-based learning and visual mapping approaches to provide pictorial representations of ideas, objects, and/or events.

It simply makes sense that teachers who learn through approaches such as those recommended by Black and his colleagues and by Brooks are more likely to understand and apply what they have learned. Of particular interest is Black and his colleagues' conclusion that it is essential if these strategies are to be implemented in classrooms that leaders find time for groups of teachers to meet on a regular basis for study and

discussion and for those groups to report on their progress at faculty meetings.

The less familiar final 2% of professional learning activities are especially well-suited to the purposes and structures of professional learning communities. *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning* (Easton, 2004) describes a number of such methods: action research, designing and evaluating student assessments, case discussions, classroom walk-throughs, Critical Friends Groups, curriculum design, data analysis, lesson study, journal writing, mentoring, peer coaching, portfolios, shadowing students, tuning protocols, and study groups, to name a few. “This type of staff development is powerful because it arises from and returns to the world of teaching and learning,” Easton writes. “It begins with what will really help young people learn, engages those involved in helping them learn, and has an effect on the classrooms (and schools, districts, even states) where those students and their teachers learn” (p. 2).

The final 2% also includes the culture-shaping activities that affect what teachers discuss, the manner in which it is discussed, the openness with which group members offer and absorb various perspectives, and the energy generated by connections to a worthy purpose and to respected colleagues (Sparks, 2005). These activities address the interpersonal challenges of leadership, the unpredictable and emotion-laden experiences that have a significant effect on human performance and relationships.

## **FUNDAMENTAL BARRIERS TO PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES**

When educators discuss barriers to professional community in schools, they almost always mention lack of money and time, recalcitrant teachers or teacher unions, and principals and district administrators who lack desire or skill in leading such efforts. While most schools would benefit from additional resources, particularly those

schools serving high concentrations of low-income and minority students, few schools effectively use the professional learning resources currently available to them. For example, faculty, department, and grade-level meetings are seldom used to promote learning and meaningful collaboration regarding teaching and learning. Staff development days often lack focus, substance, continuity across time, and extension into classroom practice in ways that significantly affect teaching. Given that perspective, I believe that the primary barriers to professional learning communities are a lack of clarity regarding values, intentions, and beliefs; dependence on those outside of schools for solutions to problems; and a sense of resignation that robs educators of the energy that is essential to continuously improving teaching, learning, and relationships in schools.

The importance of clarity is based on the premises that we move toward what is clearest to us and that it is very difficult to create what we cannot describe in some detail. Fortunately, we have the ability to clarify our values, intentions, and beliefs through processes such as writing and discussion with others.

Dependence means that teachers and principals wait for others to direct their actions. It is a byproduct of school reform initiatives that the source of direction and knowledge resides outside of K-12 schools in the hands of policymakers, researchers, and consultants. Schools are more likely to thrive, I believe, when they function interdependently with district offices, universities, and other educational entities. Schools can benefit from knowledge and perspectives derived from the outside, but for many schools the balance between internal and external sources of knowledge and action has become so skewed that those in schools no longer see themselves as initiators of action or inventors of solutions to problems.

Resignation is an intellectual and emotional state in which educators

believe that their individual and collective actions cannot improve teaching and learning, particularly given the large and serious problems that affect the lives of far too many students and their families. A profound consequence of this belief is that teachers and administrators act as if they have a very small, or perhaps even nonexistent, circle of influence related to student learning.

Here's an example from my recent experience: A teacher friend described an "inservice" in which an elementary school faculty watched videotapes about professional learning communities. My friend commented that the person speaking in the video, who happened to be Rick DuFour, said that there are obstacles to the development of professional learning communities and that she wished he had said what they were. I responded that I believed that the faculty of her school could do a pretty good job in an hour or two of identifying the barriers that stood in their way and that their list would be at least as helpful as any that DuFour might have provided.

She doubted that was true, and our conversation eventually turned to other things.

The good news is that each of us as leaders can do something about those problems, starting with ourselves. We extend our influence on teaching, learning, and relationships within schools when we are clear about our values, intentions, and assumptions. We also extend our influence when we act in ways that are consistent with the belief that we already possess the ability and authority to improve teaching, learning, and relationships.

## **A "TEACHABLE POINT OF VIEW"**

At their essence, successful professional learning communities are places in which everyone is both a teacher and a student. Continuous improvement in teaching, student achievement, and the quality of relationships among all members of the community is based on a continuous

cycle of teaching and learning and an openness by everyone in the community to learn from everyone else in the community no matter what their title or status.

In *The Cycle of Leadership: How Great Leaders Teach Their Companies to Win*, Noel Tichy (2002) describes the leader's role in such organizations: "[T]eaching is the most means through which a leader can lead" (p. 57). He adds: "Everyone in the organization is expected to be constantly in a teaching and learning mode. ... [T]rue learning takes place only when the leader/teacher invests the time and emotional energy to engage those around him or her in a dialogue that produces mutual understanding" (p. 58). The starting point, Tichy says, is when "a leader commits to teaching, creates the conditions for being taught him or herself, and helps the students have the self-confidence to engage and teach as well" (p. 21).

This teaching and learning is enacted, Tichy says, through Virtuous Teaching Cycles in which learning flows in various directions throughout the organization. Leaders' Teachable Points of View (TPOVs) provide the content, and interactive teaching offers the means for learning. "In a Virtuous Teaching Cycle," Tichy writes, "each act or event of teaching improves the knowledge and abilities of both the students and the teachers and spurs them both to go on and to share what they have learned with others. It creates a cascade of teaching and learning" (pp. 52-53).

A TPOV, Tichy writes, is "a cohesive set of ideas and concepts that a person is able to articulate clearly to others" (p. 74). A TPOV reveals clarity of thought regarding ideas and values and is a tool for communicating them to others, he says. Tichy believes it is critical that leaders have TPOVs about an "urgent need that is clear and palpable to everyone in the organization" (p. 85), "a mission that is inspiring and clearly worth achieving" (p. 86), "goals that

stretch people's abilities' (p. 86), and "a spirit of teamwork" (p. 88). He also recommends that leaders develop TPOVs for the central ideas that will move the organization toward its goals, on the values that express the type of behavior desired by the organization, on the ways to generate positive emotional energy within the organization, and on the "edge" (the thought processes that inform tough yes-or-no decisions).

## CREATING TEACHABLE POINTS OF VIEW

Earlier I asserted that significant change in organizations begins with significant change in what leaders think, say, and do. I also claimed that as this change radiates out to others, it can have a profound effect on the quality of professional learning within a school and ultimately on the school's culture and structures. These changes, I believe, have their origins in clarity regarding ideas, values, intentions, assumptions, requests, and next actions. That clarity is best expressed in simple, declarative sentences. In my experience, it is very difficult to accomplish things we cannot describe. Teachable Points of View of various lengths and levels of complexity prepared in different language and forms for different audiences and timeframes provide an ideal means for achieving such clarity.

"The very act of creating a Teachable Point of View makes people better leaders," Tichy argues. "[L]eaders come to understand their underlying assumptions about themselves, their organization, and business in general. When implicit knowledge becomes explicit, it can then be questioned, refined, and honed, which benefits both the leaders and the organizations" (p. 97).

Creating a TPOV is an unfamiliar and challenging task for many leaders, Tichy recognizes. "It requires first doing the intellectual work of figuring out what our point of view is, and then the creative work of putting it into a form that makes it accessible and interesting to others," he writes (p. 100).

## The importance of clarity is based on the premise that we move toward what is clearest to us.

Creating a TPOV is hard work, Tichy acknowledges. "It requires a total commitment of head, heart, and guts. The head part is the intellectual work of taking decades of implicit internal knowledge and making it explicit. It means framing the various ideas and beliefs that underlie your actions, and then tying them together into a cohesive whole" (p. 101).

Tichy strongly recommends writing as a means of developing a TPOV. In addition, he recommends reflecting, getting feedback from others, and revising: "The process of articulating one's Teachable Point of View is not a one-time event. It is an ongoing, iterative, and interactive process" (p. 103).

A starting place in creating TPOVs is for leaders to write a few hundred words on one of the topics of importance within professional learning communities. For instance, leaders might create TPOVs related to professional learning and collaboration in their schools, instructional leadership, quality teaching, the attributes of the relationships desired in the school among teachers and between teachers and students, and various means of assessing student progress in addition to standardized tests.

Or leaders might take Dennis Littky's advice, offered in *The Big Picture: Education is Everyone's Business* (2004): "[S]tart right now by creating your own vision of how your school might become a great school. Start this as an internal dialogue, use the margins of this book or a journal to sketch out your first ideas, and then get together with people around you and begin to build a collective vision. Imagine what your school would look like if the changes you imagine began to take hold. Live off that beauty and let it

push you on" (p. 195).

I encourage leaders to develop TPOVs on important subjects that vary in length from five-minute vision speeches to daylong interactive teaching events to brief presentations for faculty meetings, parent get-togethers, and other venues that promote the type of learning processes proposed below. Leaders also can gather a school's leadership team and create common TPOVs around central ideas and values.

## USING STORIES AND DIALOGUE TO CONVEY TEACHABLE POINTS OF VIEW

Leaders communicate their TPOVs through what Tichy calls interactive teaching. Leaders who engage in interactive teaching operate from the mindset that they have something to learn from their students as well as something to teach them and that to relate to them in that spirit is more effective than telling or selling.

Stories provide a powerful means by which TPOVs can be explained, illustrated, and understood in human terms. Stories provide listeners with a plot line and a cast of characters. Tichy recommends weaving TPOVs into stories "that people can understand, relate to and remember. It is not enough to have slogans and mission/values statements. People don't sign up for that. People follow leaders who can make them part of something exciting" (p. 121). Tichy describes three types of stories:

- Who am I? (explains the real-life experiences that have shaped the leader and his or her TPOVs);
- Who are we? (describes the common experiences and beliefs of those in the organization); and
- Where are we going? (describes what the organization is aiming to do and how it is going to do it).

Dialogue is another effective means for creating Virtuous Teaching Cycles. Dialogue is distinct from discussion,

debate, and argument.

Advocacy for a point of view is not part of dialogue, nor does it attempt to convince others that they are wrong. While these methods sometimes have their place, they often produce defensiveness, which is a barrier to the deep understanding and transformational learning that often accompany dialogue. The assumptions leaders hold as unquestionable “truths” often represent some of the most fruitful areas for dialogue because alterations in these assumptions can produce profound changes in behavior and relationships. When leaders listen with their full attention and truly honor a speaker’s views and experience, relationships are deepened and individuals profoundly changed.

“Dialogue ... imposes a rigorous discipline on the participants,” Daniel Yankelovich writes in *The Magic of Dialogue: Transforming Conflict Into Cooperation* (1999). “[W]hen dialogue is done skillfully, the results can be extraordinary: long-standing stereotypes dissolved, mistrust overcome, mutual understanding achieved, visions shaped and grounded in shared purpose, people previously at odds with one another aligned on objectives and strategies, new common ground discovered, new perspectives and insights gained, new levels of creativity stimulated, and bonds of community strengthened” (p. 16). The discipline that Yankelovich recommends includes equality among participants, an absence of coercive influences, listening with empathy, and bringing assumptions into the open while suspending judgment.

In *Dialogue: Rediscover the Transforming Power of Conversation*, Linda Ellinor and Glenna Gerard (1998) list several qualities of genuine dialogue: suspension of judgment, release of our need for a specific outcome, an inquiry into and examination of underlying assumptions, authenticity, a slower pace of interaction with silence between speakers, and listening deeply to self and others for collective meaning. To those ends, they suggest focusing on shared

Reprinted and adapted, with permission, from *On Common Ground: The Power of Professional Learning Communities* (Solution Tree, 2005).

meaning and learning, listening without resistance, respecting differences, suspending role and status distinctions, sharing responsibility and leadership, and speaking to the group as a whole (one-on-one conversations in front of a group can lead to the disengagement of other group members).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Focus your professional learning on transforming what you think, say, and do. Translate learning into action. Use transformation in thought, word, and deed as the standard against which you assess the quality of your own learning and that of others in the school community.
- Begin to address lack of clarity, resignation, and dependency by developing Teachable Points of View that address some or all of the topics suggested here.
- Use various modes of “interactive teaching” — particularly dialogue — to activate and sustain learning throughout the organization. Engage others in dialogue regarding your TPOVs. Focus on assumptions, ideas, and values. Honor others’ views and be open to having your views changed.
- Focus efforts on activities that represent the final 2% of professional learning — the part that literally changes human brains — and on collaboration to ensure that teaching, student learning, and relationships are significantly improved.

Skillful leadership on the part of principals and teachers is essential if professional learning communities are to fulfill their primary function of

continuously improving the quality of teaching, learning, and relationships in schools. To that end, what leaders think, say, and do matters.

Skillful leaders address the barriers of resignation, dependence, and lack of clarity by clearly articulating their Teachable Points of View through stories and other means, engaging the school community in continuous dialogue regarding their views, and consistently asserting that the potential of students and staff alike can be more fully realized. There is no higher purpose for the exercise of leadership in schools.

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# UPDATES

## ADVOCATE FOR TITLE II-A FUNDING

**T**here is progress in the fight to save Title II-A funding, but there is more work to do. In May, the U.S. House Appropriations Committee marked up a bill that included increased funding for Title II-A by \$500 million, but negotiations with the Senate and White House continue.

Members of Congress need to hear from you that Title II-A is critical to your schools and districts. You can help by collecting and compiling data about programs you have invested in with Title II-A funding, then share the evidence of impact on educators and students. Visit [learningforward.org/advocacy](https://www.learningforward.org/advocacy) to learn how you can get involved.



# UPDATES

## 63 MEMBERS JOIN ACADEMY CLASS OF 2021

The Learning Forward Academy Class of 2021 has begun its 2½-year program with 63 members representing 23 states and a diverse range of students, staff, and areas of professional learning focus.

The Academy is Learning Forward’s flagship deep learning experience. Participants build their knowledge of and capacity for best practices and address problems of practice while learning with other educators.

The class will learn under the coaching direction of Ramona Coleman and Stacy Winslow. Coleman is director of professional learning in Fort Wayne (Indiana) Community Schools. Winslow is assistant to the superintendent for curriculum, instruction, and assessment in Derry Township School District in Hershey, Pennsylvania.

Academy sponsors include the Learning Forward Foundation, Frontline Education, Corwin, and the Learning Forward Texas Affiliate.

For more information, visit [learningforward.org/academy](http://learningforward.org/academy).

## New senior district fellow appointed



Nikki Mouton

Nikki Mouton is Learning Forward’s new senior district fellow. Mouton will provide leadership and support for research projects and consulting.

Mouton is a graduate of the Learning Forward Academy, a former affiliate leader, and a current Academy coach. She has held leadership roles for the Dallas (Texas) ISD and Gwinnett County (Georgia) Public Schools, and she brings deep expertise from her experience as a teacher, teacher leader, professional learning facilitator, and educational consultant.

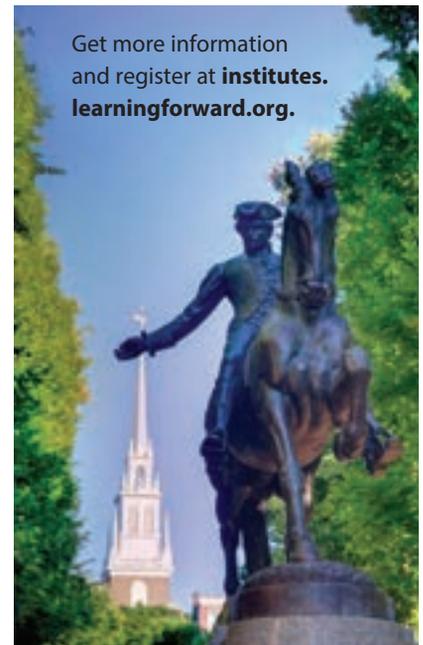
Mouton holds a doctorate from Mercer University and a bachelor’s degree from Spellman College.

## SUMMER INSTITUTES FOCUS ON EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE

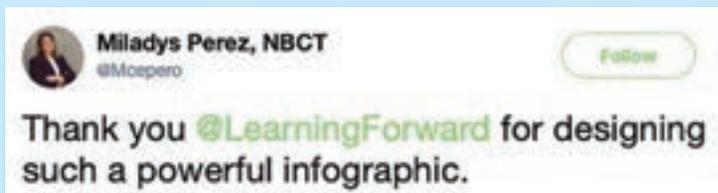
Learning Forward’s 2019 Summer Institutes offer four days of deep learning with a focus on equity and excellence. The institutes take place July 18-21 at the Westin Boston Waterfront in Boston, Massachusetts.

Learning Forward and Student Achievement Partners have teamed up, with support from the Carnegie Corporation, to present this year’s program, “Advancing Equity and Excellence: Aligning College- and Career-Ready Standards, Curriculum, Instructional Materials, and Effective Professional Learning.”

Participants will deepen their understanding of how equity outcomes require critical connections between high-quality curricula and instructional materials, and the vital intersection of curricula and professional learning.



## FEATURED SOCIAL MEDIA POST



Follow us on social media. Share your insights and feedback about *The Learning Professional* by using #LearnFwdTLP.



See that powerful infographic at [bit.ly/2VNjmJB](http://bit.ly/2VNjmJB)



Members of the Redesign PD Community, along with Learning Forward staff and consultants, meet in April in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

## Learning Forward hosts Redesign PD Community

Teams from 11 districts gathered at a convening of the Redesign PD Community in April in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The network, which began in fall 2018, aims to increase the effectiveness of teams responsible for the planning and delivery of effective professional learning in their districts.

Each participating district creates a team aim specific to its local context, and teams also learn from one another. Using improvement science principles, Learning Forward serves as the network's hub, facilitating the learning

and sharing practical resources.

Learning opportunities at the April convening included roundtable discussions and targeted networking; a microlab protocol for learning from peers using reflection and active listening skills; learning about principles of improvement science and measures of improvement; discussing successes and challenges; and planning next steps and the next convening in fall 2019.

Participant survey feedback was positive: 88% of respondents expected the roundtable and networking sessions

to greatly influence their progress, and 60% said the same about the microlabs and a session focused on equity. Furthermore, 65% of community members agree or strongly agree that the work of this community will result in less work over time, and nearly half said it is already doing so.

For more information about the Redesign PD Community, visit [learningforward.org/learning-opportunities/redesign-pd-community-of-practice](https://learningforward.org/learning-opportunities/redesign-pd-community-of-practice).

## Foundation names 2019 scholarship and grant winners

The Learning Forward Foundation has announced its 2019 scholarship and grant award winners, including two winners of the inaugural Stephanie Hirsh Academy Scholarship, which honors Learning Forward's outgoing executive director.

This year's winners are:

- **Learning Forward Foundation Academy Scholarship:** Mandy Alexander, Grapevine-Colleyville ISD, Grapevine, Texas; Nancy Routson, Arlington Public Schools, Arlington, Virginia;
- **Patsy Hochman Academy Scholarship:** Ashley White, Colleyville Heritage High School, Colleyville, Texas;
- **Stephanie Hirsh Academy Scholarship:** S. Ayesha Farag, Newton Public Schools, Auburndale, Massachusetts; Tiffany Hall, Salt Lake City School District, Salt Lake City, Utah; and
- **Learning Forward Foundation Dale Hair Affiliate Grant:** Learning Forward Michigan.

For more information about scholarships and grants, visit [foundation.learningforward.org/scholarships-and-grants](https://foundation.learningforward.org/scholarships-and-grants).

## MEET US IN ST. LOUIS AT THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Learning Forward is gearing up for the 2019 Annual Conference, to be held Dec. 7-11 in St. Louis, Missouri. The conference theme is "Gateway to Success: Our Learning. Their Future."

This year marks Learning Forward's 50th anniversary, and conference attendees are invited to celebrate during the welcome reception.

Education leaders who will facilitate learning include Zaretta Hammond, Joellen Killion, Thomas Guskey, Douglas Reeves, Courtlandt Butts, Jim Knight, Crystal Gonzales, Jill Harrison Berg, Fernando Reimers, EdReports, Sarah Nadiv, Andy Hargreaves, and Dennis Shirley.

Take advantage of early bird pricing now. Learn more about the conference and register at [conference.learningforward.org](https://conference.learningforward.org).



# 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 understanding of the standards and strategies for implementing them.

Ways you might use this tool include:

- Discuss the questions in a professional learning community;
- Share one or more articles from the issue with your staff and facilitate a conversation; and
- Do a self-assessment of what you have learned from this issue.

<p><b>STANDARD: LEADERSHIP</b></p> <p><b>IN ACTION</b></p> <p>Leadership for professional learning occurs at many levels. Teacher leaders have a unique role to play in influencing their colleagues — but they need support, because leadership skills are typically not taught in preservice or ongoing teacher-focused initiatives. On p. 26, Jill Harrison Berg describes a qualitative study about the kinds of preparation and support programs available to teacher leaders, including what they cover and who is leading them.</p>	<p><b>TO CONSIDER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What kinds of development opportunities and support are available for current and future teacher leaders in your district or organization? Do those opportunities meet the Standards for Professional Learning?</li> </ul> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Looking at the group of teacher leaders with whom you work, how diverse are they in terms of subject area taught, race, age, and other characteristics? What can you do as an individual and as an organization to increase diversity and equity in teacher leadership?</li> </ul> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p><b>STANDARD: DATA</b></p> <p><b>IN ACTION</b></p> <p>Student data provide a vital window into how much students are learning and where educators need to dedicate more attention. It is difficult to overstate the usefulness of data in driving schools' strategic priorities and specific professional learning strategies. But according to a recent study profiled by Elizabeth Foster on p. 20, educators tend to attribute student performance data to noninstructional factors, like student behavior or family circumstances. This could reduce the chances that data will spur teachers to change instruction.</p>	<p><b>TO CONSIDER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How could you help surface staff or colleagues' underlying assumptions about student performance data and its connection to instruction?</li> </ul> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can you make staff or colleagues a more integral and active part of the process of identifying instructional needs from data? How can you go deeper than a show-and-tell about student data?</li> </ul> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

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



## Effective coaches impact student outcomes



## Coaches Academy



Instructional coaches influence teaching, student learning, and school culture. Learning Forward provides coaches the foundation they need to be impactful leaders in their schools and systems.

**Learning Forward's Coaches Academy** provides comprehensive learning and ongoing guidance for coaches and the leaders who support them. We work with your coaches, in your location, to give them the knowledge and skills they need to nurture great teaching and learning.

**Our Coaches Academy empowers coaches by developing skills in:**

- Building relationships
- Leading professional learning
- Coaching individuals and teams
- Conducting classroom observations and providing meaningful feedback
- Leading data-driven conversations

**Give your coaches the skills they need to excel.**

For more information on Learning Forward's Coaches Academy, contact Tom Manning at [tom.manning@learningforward.org](mailto:tom.manning@learningforward.org).