

# THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL

THE LEARNING FORWARD JOURNAL

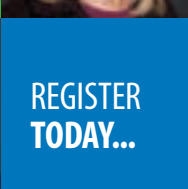
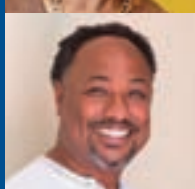
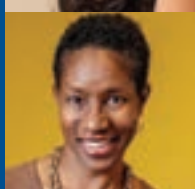
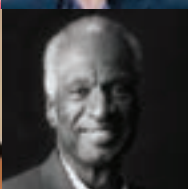
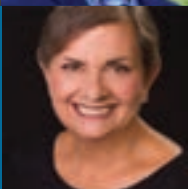
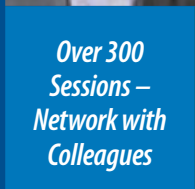
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**"F**or a long time, I talked about the system the same way many of you talk about the system, [criticizing] all the inequities, like we're somehow not a part of that. But every single day, we contribute to it if we fail to address some of these inherent discrepancies and inequities that exist in all of our school systems. [Realizing that] was a turning point for me."

— "High levels of support = high levels of success," keynote address, 2018 Learning Forward Annual Conference, Dallas, Texas

# Professional Learning Planning



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## HERE WE GO

Suzanne Bouffard

**Resilience isn't something you can give to another person, but you can establish the conditions for it and cultivate it like a garden.**

## LEADERS NEED TO CULTIVATE THEIR OWN GARDENS

**A**s we settle into October and the honeymoon period of the new school year wanes, *The Learning Professional* is taking the opportunity to address stress and resilience — specifically how professional learning can help build school leaders' resilience to handle the stresses that come with their jobs.

Education leaders need resilience more than ever. From mental health crises and public health concerns to college admissions scandals that threaten the equity of opportunity schools work hard to create, leaders face constant stress and unexpected challenges.

The concept of resilience blossomed in the 1970s and 1980s. Emmy Werner helped start a paradigm shift with her study of how some high-risk children on the island of Kauai thrived despite significant adversity (Werner, Bierman, & French, 1971). Later, research by Anne Masten, Dante Cicchetti, Suniya Luthar, and others illuminated factors and supports that help children bounce back from setbacks and succeed. This work continues to grow as research illuminates the impact of adverse childhood experiences (Felitti et al., 2019).

Resilience — the ability to overcome challenges, bounce back, and maintain strength — isn't something you can give to another person, but you can establish the conditions for it and cultivate it like a garden. Great educators do that for students every day. But leaders and teachers need to be resilient themselves, and that means they need to cultivate their own gardens, too.

Resilience doesn't come from a workshop. It develops over time, under the right conditions, including high-quality professional learning that follows the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011). For example, supportive relationships, which research shows are essential to resilience, are embedded in the Learning Communities and Leadership standards. Commitment to the long-term process of development and growth, as articulated in the Implementation standard, builds strength and focus.

As authors in this issue illustrate, high-quality professional learning promotes resilient leadership by emphasizing instructional leadership when other responsibilities and divergent backgrounds threaten it (see pp. 32 and 24); facilitating support from peers, coaches, and supervisors (see pp. 36 and 51); and developing skills that are essential for success (see p. 18).

As the school year ramps up, we invite you to lean on the Learning Forward community to cultivate your resilience. Meet up with like-minded colleagues at the Learning Forward Annual Conference in December, where we'll be celebrating our organization's 50th anniversary. And follow us on social media (#LearnFwdTLP) for information on Twitter chats, webinars, and more. We are committed to helping you continue learning, reflecting, and thriving, no matter what the school year brings your way.



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# THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL

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# VOICES

## WHERE LEARNING THRIVES

**"P**rofessional learning can thrive under many different umbrellas. But the one place it can't thrive is in a silo. ... I have become convinced that strategic alignment and collaboration are core to achieving the vision of excellence for education organizations."

— Denise Glyn Borders, p. **8**



## CALL TO ACTION

Denise Glyn Borders

# STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT IS ONGOING, CHALLENGING — AND NECESSARY

### LET ME HEAR FROM YOU

In my first several columns for *The Learning Professional*, I'll highlight specific issues that are core to my concerns as Learning Forward's president/CEO. I look forward to hearing your input and questions anytime.

**Denise Glyn Borders is president/CEO of Learning Forward.**

One of the most important roles leaders play in professional learning is strategy. Making meaningful improvements in teaching requires everyone to work toward common goals. When a district aims to improve literacy, for example, leaders should ensure that all teachers have the tools and knowledge to teach grade-appropriate skills that build on one another. Random acts of professional learning don't get schools or students to accelerated learning.

Much of our work at Learning Forward is helping states, districts, schools, and organizations approach professional learning strategically. Lately I've been focusing on a key component of strategy at the system level: how and where leaders position professional learning in the districts and schools they lead. Is it the highest priority for impacting teacher practice and student learning? What funding sources support it? How is impact measured? Where does professional learning live in the organizational chart? The variety is striking.

There is no single right answer to these questions. Professional learning can thrive under many different umbrellas. But the one place it can't thrive is in a silo. Through conversations with superintendents, chief academic officers, principals, and other leaders, I have become convinced that strategic alignment and collaboration are core to achieving the vision of excellence for education organizations.

Alignment means that everyone is looking toward the same horizon and pulling in the same direction. Everyone knows not only where they are headed as a team, but what they are accountable for and why it is essential to the goal. Actualizing this kind of alignment in the day-to-day work takes communication, collaboration, and structures to enable that collaboration.

That means that superintendents must have opportunities to communicate goals to professional development directors and listen to what they and their staff members need to achieve those goals. Instructional coaches need to hear from the directors how to focus their work in support of the districtwide goal and share how the teachers they work with are progressing. Curriculum and instruction offices need to be in this loop, too — for example, to ensure that high-quality professional learning for teachers accompanies newly selected instructional materials. Most importantly, these educators work together to design professional learning. Through such aligned, collaborative structures, the vision from leadership becomes happily married to the daily work of teaching and learning, and leaders amplify professional learning's impact when they create systems to assess changes in teacher practice and resulting improvements in student achievement.

Strategic plans should provide an articulated, and ideally visual, representation of how professional learning is integral to the district. They help everyone involved see the role of high-quality instructional materials and other essential resources. And they can inform conversations and plans for funding professional learning, a commitment we outline as important in the Standards for Professional Learning, which are scheduled for a revision beginning in 2020.

The work of strategic alignment is ongoing and challenging. I am inspired by the many superintendents, principals, and other leaders in the Learning Forward community engaged in this work. I am eager to learn from all of you about your successes, challenges, and ideas. I hope you will include Learning Forward in your collaborative process. ■





## BEING FORWARD

Leigh Wall

**In our district, school leaders and teachers have engaged in a daily balancing act of leading the core work of instruction while overseeing enhanced security measures and procedures to ensure students' safety, health, and wellness.**

**Leigh Wall is president of the Learning Forward board of trustees.**

## GO DEEPER, REACH HIGHER

**T**he term resilience is generally accepted as our capacity to recover from adversity, difficulties, or trauma. But in schools, resilience must be about rising above where we are and excelling to new heights — about thriving, not just surviving.

Over the past year, this has been a theme of my work as superintendent in Santa Fe, Texas. As our community recovers from a school shooting in 2018, our resilience goes beyond coping with the tragedy. Throughout our recovery, we have maintained a focus on rebuilding a stronger school system in every way. Focusing on students' learning is our core mission and one of the primary anchors we have used in building resilience in students, staff, and leaders.

The work of building trust and improving teaching and learning are not mutually exclusive. In our district, school leaders and teachers have engaged in a daily balancing act of leading the core work of instruction while overseeing enhanced security measures and procedures to ensure students' safety, health, and wellness.

All of our schools, for example, had to learn how to implement and manage metal detectors and alarms. Staff responded admirably and with incredible strength. But, impressively, they also were driven by a compelling purpose to achieve higher student outcomes than ever before.

Over the past year, we deepened our use of frameworks for learning designs, strengthened professional learning communities (PLCs) around core content, and focused on student performance data. We strengthened classroom support and used instructional coaching models. As a result, achievement has increased districtwide by 15 percentile points, and 17 points at the high school — a striking improvement in any context. That is resilience.



Professional learning is key to this kind of resilience. Our staff have spent a great deal of time over the past year refining their work in PLCs, collaboratively planning, and focusing on our collective determination to improve learning and achievement.

Those efforts have built relationships and trust among our learning community. Relationships, commitment, student well-being, and academic learning are all connected and critical to our successes.

Of course, for school and district leaders, there are many daily stresses that we all experience. Being a resilient educator and leader takes 100% commitment and a unique skill set that includes working well with others, focusing on continuous improvement, and managing daily challenges and opportunities.

With ongoing support and development, successful leaders navigate those challenges and opportunities without losing focus on instructional leadership and student success. The key lies within the strength of professional learning systems. Providing resources, tools, and embedded instructional support ensures the resilience needed for the important work of all educators in all communities. ■



## WHAT I'VE LEARNED

Kay Psencik

# COACHING PRINCIPALS IS A CALLING AND A COMMITMENT

**P**rincipals are smart, accomplished leaders. They want their students to be successful and have a deep moral internal drive to educate all students to high standards. But principals have complex jobs that get more complex every year.

In today's environment, workforce skills, community involvement skills, communication skills, and technology skills have become essential alongside high levels of mathematics understanding and other aspects of instructional leadership. With these many demands, principals need high-quality support and professional learning communities just like teachers but have far less access to them. Professional learning for principals still tends to be episodic and lack coherence (Southern Regional Education Board, 2010; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010).

Principal coaching is an important approach for changing that pattern. Coaching is strategic, ongoing, and personalized. It fosters just-in-time principal learning. When principals are coached well, they have a nonevaluative thought partner who assists them in working on issues specific to them and their schools. This changes principals' attitudes and practices so they can see new opportunities for themselves and those they serve.

Coaching principals is a unique role. It is not facilitation, mentoring, or modeling. It involves the powerful skill of becoming a sincere thought partner with the coachee. Coaching principals is a calling and a commitment. It's a calling because it is humbling and other-centered. It's a commitment because seeing new practices emerge in principals takes time.

I have coached hundreds of principals from upstate New York to Fort Wayne, Indiana, to Galveston County, Texas. Here are some of the lessons I have learned.

### TRUST HOLDS RELATIONSHIPS TOGETHER.

Coaches must build trust in all directions. This includes, of course, with principal coachees. When principals do not trust their coach's competence or willingness to maintain confidentiality, they are not open or willing to really problem solve issues that are barriers to their school's success.

In addition, coaches must build trust with district leaders by keeping them informed. When district leaders grow uncomfortable with principal coaches, they see no value in their work and easily dismiss them.

This can be a tricky balance. Not long ago, a principal shared with me a concern about a high school American history team that was not working well together. She knew she was accountable



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for better student performance in these classes, but she was making no strides with the team. As I explored the real issues, the principal finally shared her struggles with a male social studies department leader who really wanted her job and blocked everything she tried to do to move the team.

To build trust in this situation, I worked with the principal to create new strategies to build a relationship with this department leader, helped her establish a short-term goal, and most importantly, maintained confidentiality. I knew there was no need to discuss this situation with the principal's supervisor, her peers, or her district leaders.

Sometimes, there is an expectation or a need for coaches to keep district leaders informed about the work with principals. In this case, I could have told the leadership something like, "She is working on a great, challenging goal, and she is eager to share it with you when she has found a solution."

Sometimes I choose to coach the principals about how to have a productive conversation with their supervisors. But I put the choice of disclosing the problem in the hands of the principal.

Coaching shouldn't be about the coach. It is about the principal. Being other-centered means not taking center stage, not sharing her story, and not robbing the coachee of the opportunity to create her own future.

## **LISTENING AND QUESTIONING ARE ESSENTIAL SKILLS.**

The essential skills of a coach are so easily said but so difficult to do. This is especially true of listening. Listening is about asking questions, not giving answers. A coach's role is not to tell principals what they would do, not to give them advice, not to share stories, not to commiserate. The key to success is listening from the coachee's point of view and assisting them to stay focused

## **Listening is about asking questions, not giving answers. A coach's role is not to tell principals what they would do, not to give them advice, not to share stories, not to commiserate.**

on their own learning.

In a professional learning session for principals a few years ago, I offered an hour of coaching to all principals in the session. They signed up for every hour over three days, six hours a day. I coached either individually or in small teams every hour.

Over the three days, I had asked lots of questions, and my last group was a small group of new principals. They were asking me simple questions about how to meet their staffs for the first time, how to organize their first parent meetings, how to make sure students get to know them. In my tired state of mind, I gave in to making suggestions and I forgot all about coaching. It did not take me long to remember why listening and questioning are the essential skills of coaches. Every suggestion I made was met with, "Well, I am not sure that will work in my school because ..." or "I know some of the teachers on my staff already, and I am not willing to go there yet."

The effective principal coach knows the answers are within the principal and that, through intense listening and honest exploratory questioning, the principal will come to his or her own solutions. When questions stimulate thought and innovation, principals have space to create their own new and innovative ideas and solutions. Only when the coach is willing to be patient and let the learner do the learning do principals grow more confident in

themselves and commit to different approaches.

## **STAYING FOCUSED LEADS TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT.**

Principals often stray from their core work — ensuring students and staff are learning — in part because they know that other issues, such as the mismanagement of the buildings or their budgets, or out-of-control students and parents, could get them in real trouble with their supervisors. The challenge is for the coach to assist the principal to stay focused on the core work of instructional leadership.

The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders can help the coach and coachee stay focused on this goals (NPBEA, 2015). In particular, Standard 4 states that effective principals lead curriculum, assessment, and instruction, and Standard 6 states that effective principals ensure that educators are increasing their effectiveness every day.

When coaches keep principals focused on these two areas, they have a much stronger opportunity to accelerate principals' learning. Each standard has precise descriptors that assist principals in assessing their strengths and setting their goals.

Wise coaches keep principals focused on how student and staff performance inform their own learning needs, by analyzing student and staff data and discussing classroom observation and walk-through data as well as observations of teachers' learning communities.

As the principal learning goal is set, the coach facilitates the principal coachee through a cycle of continuous improvement. As the coach moves the principal from setting goals, to exploring new leadership skills, to setting a plan and implementing it, to reflecting and monitoring their own progress, the principal develops

competence and confidence in the leadership areas that matter the most.

Throughout this process, the coach may have to help the principal stay focused on the goals. Principals are so focused on the learning of everyone around them that, when working with them, coaches may find themselves saying often, “No, remember, this is not about goals others achieve. This is your learning goal. As you learn your new strategies, you become more effective in helping teaching teams achieve their goals.”

### CONNECTION IS KEY.

Since principals are ultimately responsible for the success of all, they often feel alone. Learning Forward has run several networks for principal learning (e.g. Arizona Learning Leaders for Learning Schools initiative, Galveston County Learning Leaders Learning Communities in Texas, and

Twin Tiers Principals Coalition in Corning, New York), and we have heard over and over that the most valuable gift the facilitators gave them was the gift of their community.

This kind of connection is essential, whether it comes from a network or an individual coaching relationship. Coaches should help principals feel well-held. In *The Coach's Craft*, I reference the story about my grandmother and how as a child I loved having her hold my hands in hers (Psencik, 2011). I was fascinated by her hands. She was a gardener, so her hands were always picking vegetables, shelling peas, canning peaches.

Her hands were unbelievably soft and, when I held them, I felt safe. There was comfort there, and energy. Great coaching is like those hands — quietly comforting, caring, and patient, yet inspiring and energizing. When we support others and encourage, inspire,

and challenge them, we assist those who are angry, challenged, frustrated, resigned, and resentful to find audacious hope. There is no better gift.

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Examine. Study. Understand.

# RESEARCH



## KEEP RESEARCH FRONT AND CENTER

**S**taying up to date with research on professional learning is important for all of us, but it can be challenging. On p. 14, Elizabeth Foster explains how she stays in the know and shares tips for keeping research front and center in your work. And, as with every issue of *The Learning Professional*, we highlight some of the latest research and resources to keep you informed. On p. 16, you'll find summaries of recent reports on instructional materials, leadership turnover, learning differences, and growth mindset.



## RESEARCH REVIEW

Elizabeth Foster

# WE'RE WORKING TO CLOSE THE GAP BETWEEN RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

**T**he importance of making educational decisions based on evidence has never been clearer. Recognizing this, policymakers have emphasized evidence and reporting requirements in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and we are heartened to see more educators and nonprofit leaders using research and evidence to inform decisions about instructional and programmatic choices, resource allocation, and planning. Many forces point to the need to stay on top of reading and understanding research studies related to professional learning.

Two challenges that arise in this pursuit are time and generalizability.

The volume of newly released studies can be overwhelming and hard to sort. Finding the time to do so is challenging. This column and the “At a glance” feature at the end of the magazine are two of the ways Learning Forward is addressing this challenge.

In addition, Learning Forward’s conference sessions must be based on a body of research. This not only expands the research base available but also links that research to broader applications and opens the dialogue about current research and research needed in the future. As Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning emphasize, evidence and data are critical to relevant and results-based professional learning.

Learning Forward’s goal is to expand this curating of research studies and analyses related to professional learning to close the gap between research and practice. In the meantime, this column offers ways to learn more about research relevant to your current implementation choice or next problem of practice.

Generalizability is another challenge. A single randomized control trial study presents findings about a specific intervention or project under highly controlled conditions. While the study is of value due to its precision and what it adds to the evidence base, the ability to generalize from one study is limited.

Just as we don’t view each of the Standards for Professional Learning in isolation from the rest, practitioners and policymakers have to be thoughtful in the weight they give any particular study. In addition, interesting research about education programs or models often does not specifically address professional learning specifics.

We would like to see more studies about professional learning and its impact on teachers and students, school climate, teacher retention and development, and leadership. Studies may look at the impact on student outcomes of a particular school design or curriculum without delineating or defining the professional learning required to implement that curriculum or follow through on the design.

Increasing the amount of research focused on professional learning as well as elevating the inquiry about professional learning in studies is a priority we will continue to advance.

A recent exchange with researchers illustrates these challenges. In the last issue of *The Learning Professional*, this column featured a study about professional learning for writing. The lead author of that study said she appreciated our sharing the research with Learning Forward’s audience. She also cited additional studies of professional learning conducted with practice-based professional



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development for writing, reminding us that “a single study does not generalize, but a corpus of work can lead us to draw some conclusions about what might work.”

## WHERE TO LOOK FOR STUDIES

The following are some of the resources that Learning Forward staff and consultants look to for studies that provide evidence and knowledge related to professional learning.

**Journals.** The American Educational Research Association has many journals, including *Educational Researcher*, *Review of Research in Education*, and *AERA Open*, a peer-reviewed, open-access journal focused on education and learning in various contexts, such as early childhood, after-school, primary, secondary, and post-secondary education.

We also look at the *International Journal of Innovation and Research in Educational Sciences*, *Nature*, and *Teachers College Record*, as well as publications from the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences and National Center for Education Statistics.

**University research and policy centers.** These are also excellent sources for studies and commentaries. The Annenberg Institute at Brown University posts a wide range of education-related studies prior to peer review at [edworkingpapers.com](http://edworkingpapers.com).

The National Education Policy Center at the University of Colorado at Boulder publishes reviews of research, critically examining methodologies and the implications drawn from the research.

**Media overviews and columns.** These can offer good summaries and leads, such as research-focused columns like *Education Week’s* Inside School Research blog. Written by Sarah Sparks, the blog is a good source of research insights relevant to learning conditions or professional learning systems improvement. Summary emails from [www.the74million.org](http://www.the74million.org) provide a few sentences about the latest news and studies in K-12 and higher education. Round-ups such as these can help narrow down one’s reading list before delving deeply into studies.

**Podcasts.** Podcasts are a good way to get information about interesting new research, either via summaries by organizations or interviews with researchers themselves. The CPRE Knowledge Hub website ([cprehub.org/research-minutes](http://cprehub.org/research-minutes)) is an excellent starting point. Each 20-minute podcast provides an overview of research about issues ranging from how educators experience standards-based reform to how well an online intervention encourages growth mindset development and academic achievement for students.

**Research organizations’ websites.** Use these as resources for studies about research and evaluation of particular models or programs, as well as other materials and resources. Websites to explore for studies related to teaching, learning, and human development include the American Institutes for Research, WestEd, and RAND. These resources can be used to inform school- or district-level decisions about sustaining and scaling a coaching program, learn about the costs and

benefits of an intervention or model, or find out how to use a study as a starting point for a discussion among practitioners.

**Webinars.** Webinars are another technology-enabled support for learning that can be watched in real time or at your convenience. Learning Forward’s website has many webinars that provide information about topics such as studies considered appropriate evidence under ESSA and studies that have contributed to the growing research base about effective social and emotional learning.

In addition, many nonprofit organizations and federally funded regional labs offer free webinars and other resources related to research, with the goal of supporting a more evidence-based education system. The mid-Atlantic regional lab at Mathematica has a free webinar on research about culturally responsive pedagogy and what is known about its effectiveness and implications for implementation, part of a series on the topic that includes guest speakers and examples of implementation.

These suggestions are just pieces of the overall puzzle, meant to suggest new resources or avenues for exploration. There are many, many more.

Learning Forward is actively building our lists of sources as we work to increase our contributions to the body of research related to professional learning. To that end, we are always seeking more resources and ideas as well as input from the Learning Forward community about what to read, what to highlight, and where to look. Please share your thoughts and ideas with me at [elizabeth.foster@learningforward.org](mailto:elizabeth.foster@learningforward.org). ■

# ESSENTIALS

## REVIEWS OF INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

K12 Instructional Materials Dashboard  
*SETDA, 2019*

The State Educational Technology Directors Association has compiled states' reviews of instructional



materials in English language arts and math for secondary school students. Sortable by state, content and subject,

grade level, and other characteristics, the website is designed to support state, district, and school leaders in selecting instructional materials. The association hopes to expand the dashboard to other grade levels and content areas.

[qualitycontent.setda.org/dashboard](http://qualitycontent.setda.org/dashboard)

## ALIGNMENT GAP

The State of the Instructional Materials Market  
*EdReports, Spring 2019*

EdReports reviewed the state of instructional materials today to assess how well materials marketed as standards-aligned really do



warrant that claim. Its analysis used data from EdReports reviews of instructional materials and data from the

American Teacher Panel nationally representative survey on English language arts and math curriculum use during the 2017-18 school year.

The analysis found that 49% of the English language arts and 28% of the math market meet EdReports criteria for standards alignment, showing that high-quality options are available. However, only 15% of English language arts materials and 23% of math materials regularly used by teachers meet the criteria for

alignment.

There's encouraging news, though: The longer a review has been on EdReports, the more likely the materials are to be used if highly rated and the less likely to be used if rated as not aligned.

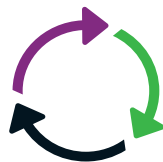
[www.edreports.org/impact/state-of-the-market](http://www.edreports.org/impact/state-of-the-market)

## SCHOOL LEADER TURNOVER

Principal Turnover: Insights From Current Principals  
*Learning Policy Institute, July 18, 2019*

Why do principals leave their jobs? The National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Learning Policy Institute released the second-phase results from a yearlong study of principal turnover.

Focus groups with 17 administrators highlighted similar themes to the previously published literature review, including the stresses of a ballooning set of responsibilities, lack of decision-making authority, and lack of time and resources for



instructional leadership.

When asked how to improve their jobs, these administrators stressed the importance of professional learning, mentorship, and opportunities for collegial relationships to foster professional growth.

<https://bit.ly/2kHFw3u>

## LEARNING DIFFERENCES

Forward Together: Helping Educators Unlock the Power of Students Who Learn Differently  
*National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2019*

The National Center for Learning Disabilities and Understood.org studied how prepared general education teachers feel to support students with mild to moderate learning disabilities, and the results

are sobering.

Based on a nationally representative survey of 1,350 teachers and focus groups with a smaller set of teachers, they found that only 17% of teachers feel very well-prepared to teach students with mild to moderate learning disabilities and only 30% of teachers feel strongly that, when they try their best, they can be successful with the 1 in 5 students who have mild to moderate disabilities.

Based on a review of state policies,



the researchers discovered that only seven states require specific coursework in teaching students with disabilities

for licensure, and at least one-third of teachers reported that they have not participated in professional development on learning and attention issues.

<https://bit.ly/2m94N6V>

## GROWTH MINDSET

A National Experiment Reveals Where a Growth Mindset Improves Achievement  
*Nature, August 7, 2019*

Promoting growth mindset is a popular strategy in schools, but does it work? A nationally representative study suggests that it does. A brief, low-cost online module that teaches



students that intellectual abilities can be developed with effort was associated with improved grades

among low-achieving secondary students and increased enrollment in advanced math courses. The effect was sustained over time when messages about growth mindset were reinforced by students' peers.

[www.nature.com/articles/s41586-019-1466-y](http://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-019-1466-y)

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# FOCUS

RESILIENT LEADERSHIP



## HOW LEADERS BUILD THE STRENGTH TO SUCCEED

**S**chool leaders juggle a lot of balls over the course of the day and the year. Stress is an unofficial part of the job. Great leaders have tools for building strength in the face of these challenges, rebounding from setbacks, and constantly improving to lead their teachers and students to excellence. Authors in this issue's Focus section share how leaders' learning and growth are key to success.



# ANCHORS FOR RESILIENCE


STRATEGIES AND ROUTINES  
RESILIENT LEADERS USE  
TO BALANCE COMPETING PRIORITIES

BY ANTHONY KIM, TOMÁS HANNA, AND JOSÉ DOTRES

**D**emands on education leaders are changing rapidly, and being a leader isn't getting any easier. Principals, superintendents, and others are pulled and stretched in many directions by staff, parents, community members, and school boards, as well as their own families.

Leaders' roles require them to have an attention to detail, an ability to be strategic and disciplined, and the skills to connect emotionally with others — and to do so all at the same time, and even in trying times.

In this context, resilience is a crucial component of effective leadership. Resilience is made up of mindset and behaviors. It is predicated on the belief that setbacks are temporary and create opportunities to learn. It begins with optimism, mindfulness, clarity about the work to be done, and trust in the intentions and abilities of your team. But it must be



practiced, modeled, and refined over time.

As leaders of complex organizations, the three of us have reviewed literature from diverse fields, including psychology, business, and the military, to understand what strategies and routines resilient leaders use and how they balance competing priorities. According to our review, resilient leadership has three anchors:

- Building psychological safety;
- Maintaining a learning organization; and
- Applying individual discipline.

In this article, we describe why each is important and how each can be cultivated by education leaders for the benefit of their teams. We draw on both our experience and examples as well as those from other highly effective organizations.

## BUILDING PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY



According to Stanford instructor Laura Delizonna, psychological safety is the belief that you won't be punished when you make a mistake. She explains that it "allows for moderate risk-taking, speaking your mind, creativity, and sticking your neck out without fear of having it cut off" (Delizonna, 2017).

Some leaders dismiss discussions of psychological safety as the touchy-feely stuff that detracts from getting work done, but we do not believe this to be the case. In her book *The Fearless Organization* (2019), Amy Edmondson shows that psychological safety is essential to the completion of the kinds of work that will enable an organization to be forward-thinking and innovative.

When you feel psychologically unsafe, your brain responds in the same way it would in the face of a physical threat: The fight-or-flight response is triggered, placing you in a highly reactive state and shutting down the brain's capacity to think creatively or strategically (Edmondson, 2019).

Studies show that psychological safety leads to team effectiveness. For example, when Google conducted a study to determine what makes for a successful team, researchers found that the key to overall success was not who was on the team, but whether the team provided psychological safety (Duhigg, 2016; re:Work, n.d.).

How might resilient leadership create space to promote psychological safety? It starts with having some fun and incorporating play in your work and with your team. When there is the spirit of having fun or play in work, you are more apt to take calculated risks, share what you don't know, and ask for help. This leads to creativity, learning new things, and getting comfortable with making the necessary mistakes to

getting work done.

What does this look like in education organizations? It may start with being able to laugh at yourself in front of others. We tell self-deprecating jokes, share memes, wear the odd baseball cap from time to time, and share things that are happening in our personal lives — highlights about our kids, moving to a new home, that time we went on a work trip and forgot to pack pants.

We share what we are passionate about, what we are reading, and what we are listening to. We also share challenges, highlighting things we don't fully understand, asking for discussion, and noting when a team member has expertise or insights that can benefit us and the rest of the team.

We use time together not just to talk about our accomplishments, but also our learnings about the things we tried that did not go well. When we share, it encourages others to share, too.

One specific strategy we use to facilitate this kind of communication is starting meetings with check-ins and ending them with check-outs (Kim, Gonzales-Black, & Lai, 2018). A check-in prompt helps team leaders gauge the state of mind of the people in the meeting and allows the group to learn about each other's lives and personalities. Even in weekly meetings as large as 40 people, our check-ins allow each person to get emotionally present and find that psychological safe space.



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Check-out prompts are quick reflections on the value of the meeting to each attendee. In addition to giving team leaders feedback they can use to improve future meetings, they implicitly message that they value everyone's time and opinions.

It is important to note that using these practices doesn't mean teams don't have disagreements. On the contrary, as the safety increases, teams will find that people are more comfortable raising concerns and proposing solutions. That makes teams more productive and effective.

### MAINTAINING A LEARNING ORGANIZATION



Learning organizations are those that are continually learning and growing and evolving. They embody the spirit of what Reid Hoffman, the founder of LinkedIn, calls the "infinite learner" (Hoffman, 2017).

Infinite learners are constantly expanding their expertise and continuously overcoming their own shortcomings. Over time, their ability to tackle new challenges is unquestionable. Hoffman (2017) says there are no permanent experts; at our best, we all need to be continually growing and learning.

Learning organizations are composed of learning individuals. So what do leaders in a successful learning organization do? Leaders create space and time for teams to develop experiences and reflect on them so that they build expertise together.

They regularly practice behaviors and model norms like holding daily team huddles, ensuring all team members have equal amounts of talk time in meetings, and asking team members to reflect at the end of each meeting to share what they learned.

As a leader, you have to model learning by publicly sharing your own

efforts for professional and personal growth. In doing so, your team will see that learning requires discipline, regular reinforcement and activity, sharing and transferring of knowledge, and staying in the zone of proximal development, the optimal range in which individuals are ready to stretch and learn with some support (Vygotsky, 1978).

We model learning in public, taking the risk that we will not be excellent on the first try, and allowing our teams to see us try, fail, learn, and try again. Anthony Kim makes a practice of learning a completely new, high-risk skill every four to five years. One year it was scuba diving, another year it was snowboarding, and recently he started learning how to surf.

This year, after learning from three different instructors, he shared his reflections on his role as a student, and how his experience changed with the instructional style of each teacher (Kim, 2019). In sharing his experience, Kim provided his organization with inspirations about how learning can happen everywhere, but he also models vulnerability.

You also have to show that taking the time to stop and learn is valued. Show real interest in what people are learning and doing. Ask them about that podcast they mentioned or applaud them for sharing an article. When you don't show that you value these efforts, they begin to fall to the bottom of team members' to-do lists as they instead focus on what needs to get done today rather than learning something that might help them in the future.

Becoming a learning organization isn't a one-and-done job. It is a



**As a leader, you have to model learning by publicly sharing your own efforts for professional and personal growth.**

continuous state of learning and improvement that requires trying new processes, reflecting on them, and refining or replacing them over time.

### APPLYING INDIVIDUAL DISCIPLINE



Perhaps one of the hardest things about being a leader in a complex organization, especially in those with as many competing priorities as schools, is maintaining focus and individual discipline to achieve your goals.

One way to think about individual discipline is creating (and evolving) habits with intention. When team members can see you engage in those habits of discipline, they see you as more predictable, and predictability creates trust.

Jocko Willink, in *Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win*, shares example after example of how important discipline is in leadership. Whether it's becoming a Navy SEAL, writing a book, or doing a weekly podcast, getting stuff done takes discipline.

Discipline is the act of finding consistent time to work on what you committed to. In fact, he goes further to say that personal discipline "is the pathway to freedom." In other words, the more individual discipline you demonstrate, the more freedom you will receive to practice "decentralized command" (Willink, n.d.).

Willink defines decentralized command as: "To be effectively empowered to make decisions, it is imperative that frontline leaders execute with confidence. Tactical leaders must be confident that they clearly understand the strategic mission. They must have implicit trust that their senior leaders will back their decisions. Without this trust, junior leaders cannot confidently execute"

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(Harbourne, 2016).

Teams may look to leaders for examples of how to spend their time, how to act with others, and how to learn and grow. We need to model the approaches we want to see teams put into practice. Reflecting on our habits, then publicly creating positive habits and quitting negative habits is a way to practice discipline and model it for our teams (Duhigg, 2014).

For us, this starts with understanding our values, including why we do our work and how that fits with our family and personal lives, and then meticulously aligning our practices to serve our values and purpose. We create structures to ensure that we can do what matters to us.

We choose to prioritize family, so we make certain to block out the time for teacher conferences for our children and doctor's appointments for ourselves, and we schedule work commitments around them. We create predictable routines, like preparing meals for the week and setting out clothes the night before. We use our commuting time for learning, rest, and preparations for the day so we are more present with others at work and home.

When you engage in these habits over and over again, you realize what works for you and what doesn't. Keep doing the things that work for you, as they will become second nature and create even more time for you. Stop doing the things that don't allow you to keep your commitments consistently.

## MAKE IT YOUR OWN

To be a resilient leader, you will ultimately need to develop your own style. As you embark on or continue your own leadership journey, you may find it helpful to consider insights from Jennifer Garvey Berger's book, *Simple Habits for Complex Times: Powerful Practices for Leaders*.

Berger talks about the importance of connecting leadership and learning, and reminds us that both need to coexist. In essence, as leaders we have to have a vision for a future different than

**When you engage in these habits over and over again, you realize what works for you and what doesn't. Keep doing the things that work for you, as they will become second nature and create even more time for you.**



today, share it with people around us, and get stuff done (Berger & Johnston, 2016).

As leaders, we need to aim for shifting mindsets so we can move teams forward, recover quickly from setbacks, and maintain optimism and composure. In a complex and fast-changing world, just snapping back from setbacks isn't enough to be resilient. We have to adapt and evolve each time we bounce back. Every time we struggle and recover should be a learning experience.

The role of a modern resilient leader isn't just to withstand difficult conditions. It is to learn and improve because of them and anticipate the future.

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# HOW SCHOOL LEADERS MANAGE STRESS AND STAY FOCUSED

**L**et's face it: Stress is part of the job of a school leader. How can principals and other leaders manage the stress so they can be resilient and effective? We asked five experts to share their advice.

## BALANCE URGENCY WITH PURPOSEFUL ACTION

By **Ayesha Farag**

Principal of Williams Elementary School  
in Newton, Massachusetts,  
Recipient of the inaugural Stephanie Hirsh Academy  
Scholarship from the Learning Forward Foundation

**N**ow entering my 13th year as a principal, I have become quite familiar with the stresses and challenges of the role as well as the joys and rewards. In recent years, I've had a growing awareness of how my expectations for myself and the urgency I feel to act quickly exacerbate the stresses inherent in the role.

I've learned that it's important to take time to slow down, reflect, and take purposeful action in order to maintain the passion, energy, and enthusiasm that fuel the important work of leadership.

I've found three practices to be especially helpful:

**Connect with other school leaders.** No one else knows the joys and challenges like others walking in our shoes. Our school leader colleagues are an invaluable source of support, ideas, resources, inspiration, and feedback. I am fortunate to work in a district with 14 supportive elementary principals. But

principals can also make connections via nearby districts, professional organizations, and electronic communities.

**Deliberately seek joy in the work.**

During the most stressful times, we tend to find ourselves distanced from the aspects of the work that inspire us most and remind us why we became school leaders. Deliberately seeking the joy in our work reconnects us with our purpose and can provide a much-needed infusion of inspiration and energy when we need it most. For example, making time to connect with students, whether in the classroom, recess, or lunch, is always a recharging experience for me.

**Invest in out-of-school relationships and interests.** For so many of us, the tireless work ethic that helps us be successful can also lead us to neglect relationships and interests outside of school. Protecting time to invest in our friends, families, and interests feeds and restores us as *humans* and re-energizes us. This is an ongoing challenge for me, but over the course of this past year, I committed to a regular group gathering with friends once a month. Though tempted to bail out at times when things were stressful, going was always the right choice. Self-care is most important during challenging times.



## KEEP THE FOCUS ON INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

By **Emily Becker**

Transformation Network partner  
at Partners in School Innovation,  
San Francisco, California

**W**hen I became a principal, I took on an exponential increase in responsibility, and I didn't know how to prioritize instructional leadership given the mountain of administrative tasks. Now as a leadership coach, I look back at my years as principal to share five things I learned about being more effective:

**Lead from your "why."** Leaders often get stuck in the "how" and the "what" of the job and lose sight of their "why." It's important to stay grounded in your motivation for working in schools.

**Invest in your own professional growth.** Effective principals are made, not born. However, many principals do not take advantage of professional development provided by the district office or seek out their own professional learning opportunities. School leaders should consider acknowledging their need for continuous professional learning as a sign of strength, not weakness.

**Distribute leadership by building staff members' capacity.**

In most public schools, there is more work to be done than people to do it. This can leave principals feeling like they have to do everything, and instructional leadership ends up taking a back seat. When you build staff members' capacity to handle a variety of challenges, you can focus on instruction.

**Protect time to be in classrooms.** If you place a high value on instructional leadership, you must have time for classroom observations and professional learning with teachers. In my coaching, I ask principals how much of the week they want to devote to these processes. Next, we consider the types of noninstructional demands that can arise and identify staff who will address them. Then the school leader communicates these roles to everyone on staff so that everyone knows what to do when a need arises and understands his or her role in protecting the principal's time for instructional leadership.

**Give yourself grace.** No principal can address every challenge and meet every goal she sets for herself. Accept imperfection and recognize the many successes you do achieve. This can help you focus on your most important responsibility — upholding your school's vision for academic achievement.



## HELP SCHOOL LEADERS THRIVE

**By Nicholas Orlowski**  
 Director of professional learning,  
 Grand Rapids (Michigan) Public Schools

**R**esearch on high-performing organizations has found something they all have in common: They are full of thriving employees. According to business professor Gretchen Spreitzer, thriving employees find themselves learning constantly and in ways that improve their performance. They also

find work fills them with vitality and a sense of aliveness during the work day that acts as an antidote to boredom and burnout.

Most of the research on thriving comes from the business world, but I recently conducted a study on thriving among teachers, and it has implications for school leaders as well. I surveyed about 100 middle school teachers and conducted follow-up interviews with a subsample of those who scored high and low on a measure of thriving.

Thriving teachers focused on two major sources of learning and vitality: students and

peers. On the learning side, thriving teachers believed they got better at their job because they got to know their students and designed instruction accordingly.

They also cited the support provided by peers during PLCs and other collaborative professional learning.

Furthermore, they said this collaboration built camaraderie that spilled over into more informal peer learning conversations. School leaders can learn from these findings and



## BUILD SELF-REGULATION SKILLS

**By Lisa Cranston**  
 Self-regulation facilitator for the MEHRIT Centre  
 and retired education consultant,  
 Harrow, Ontario, Canada

**U**nrelenting stress has become a permanent part of the modern principalship, and it is imperative that we find healthy and productive strategies to manage this increasing stress load. We know that self-regulation skills are important for children, and these same skills are essential for adult resilience.

Among many definitions of self-regulation, the one that is most helpful for educational leaders is that coined by Stuart Shanker (2013), who refers to self-regulation as “how people manage stress, how much energy we expend, and how well we recover.”

Shanker (2016) provides a set of five steps for self-regulation:

**1. Reframe behavior.** Asking “why and why now?” can help us stop and understand our feelings and reactions. The goal is to get to a state where we can engage the neocortex or prefrontal cortex, which allows us to think, reason, and plan. It’s helpful to recognize when we are instead acting based on our “reptilian” brain, which takes charge when we feel threatened, or “mammalian brain,” which makes us focus on strong emotions and urges.

**2. Recognize the stressors.** We are often bombarded by stressors from multiple domains simultaneously. On a recent morning, I was rushing to an appointment with no time for breakfast (biological stressor). I was worried about being late for my appointment (emotional and prosocial) and thinking about feedback for students in an online course I was teaching (cognitive). Recognizing these stressors allows us to make a conscious effort to address them. As I drove to my appointment, I switched the radio from a news station to quiet music, loosened my grip on the steering wheel, lowered my shoulders, and took deep breaths.

**3. Reduce stressors.** The goal of reducing stressors is not to eliminate all stress from our lives. Some stress is necessary for us to be engaged and productive. But reducing the stressors we *can* control restores the energy we would have expended on them and frees it up for coping with other stressors.

**4. Reflect and enhance stress awareness.** In today’s hyperkinetic society, many people no longer know what calm feels like, or they confuse the mindlessness of screen time with being calm. Sometimes people view their busyness as an indicator of their importance and worth. When you reframe that and become aware of the impact of that busyness, you are more able to find a few minutes to take a self-regulation break and bring yourself closer to a state of calmness.

**5. Respond.** Develop personal strategies to promote restoration and resilience. Each of us needs to develop our own personal toolbox of self-regulation strategies that helps us feel calm and alert. Start by creating a list of your current strategies for restoring energy and add those you want to try. How do you refill your tank when it is empty? Make sure you consider some restoration strategies that you can use while you’re at work. For example, for many elementary administrators, heading down to the kindergarten room and spending a few minutes with a group of enthusiastic 5-year-olds helps restore their energy.

It’s important to remember that self-regulation is a never-ending process of learning to identify our stressors, understanding why we react to them in certain ways, and developing a repertoire of strategies to restore our energy when depleted. Once we begin this journey ourselves, we also help others by looking at them and their behavior through the compassionate lens of self-regulation.

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pursue similar ways to network with peers and connect with students — for example, by using student input to reimagine policies and procedures that need revamping.

Thriving teachers felt invigorated because of the passions they could pursue in their practice. They routinely experienced reminders that they chose the profession for a reason. School leaders are further removed from the students they serve and may need to find ways to experience that motivation and vitality on a daily basis that they experienced in the classroom.

Thriving teachers also knew that to do

their job well they needed sufficient energy. School leaders, too, should consider keeping track of their energy level to gauge vitality. If energy levels often feel low, it could be a sign that the work is failing to invigorate.

In my role, I work with district leadership and apply these findings to help ensure leaders and teams thrive. We ask them to focus on a problem of practice and provide ongoing support to work on it, so the learning is relevant and invigorating. School leaders who take time to pursue work that fuels their passion and addresses their needs could not only avoid burnout and boredom,

but their schools benefit, too. They bring more knowledge to bear, and they collaborate more and help others, according to Spreitzer's research.

I think of learning and vitality as canaries in the coal mine. When one or both start to drop, it's important to take time to reflect and find ways to bring them back to life. Wanting to learn and experience vitality is not selfish — it's something that benefits the whole school.

## MAKE MINDFULNESS A HABIT

By **Julia Mahfouz**

Assistant professor of leadership and counseling  
at the University of Idaho

**O**f all the professions in the helping fields, school administrators may have the highest stress and burnout rates. All over the world, principals are facing unprecedented levels of accountability pressure and other stressors.

When I was a principal, I was stressed and exhausted — the expectation to cope with constant changes, maintaining positive school relationships with all the stakeholders of the schools, attending to the various needs and expectations of parents. I ended up leaving school leadership for academia.

My research is driven by my interest in exploring the social and emotional dynamics in schools. I believe cultivating the social and emotional competencies of principals is integral to effective leadership and to achieve healthy, caring, welcoming school climate, but not all principal preparation programs focus on these competencies such as how to deal with difficult parents or challenging staff situations.

I worked with Christa Turksma, one of the co-developers of CARE (Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education) to facilitate professional learning after modifying it to be relevant to principals. For example, she created role-playing exercises specific to principals. The professional learning included five hours of mindfulness sessions over five weeks, with a booster session four weeks later.

Because principals don't usually take a lot of time for self-care, we emphasized it as important. We also focused on several practices such as setting intentions, checking their emotional elevators, mindful listening, mindful walking, centering, wait time, awareness of scripts, breathing and self-compassion practices. Because principals are putting out fires all day, it's important for them to learn to not be reactive in the moment. It can help to use these practices and be committed to have them become a habit.

Principals reported on how the demands of their jobs exceed their capacity. Many talked about the emotional exhaustion that kept them from being as caring as they wanted to be or about depersonalizing their colleagues and students they wanted to support. They were overwhelmed by responding to emails and worried about parent comments on social media.

After they completed the program, principals reported an increase in leadership skills like self-reflection, positive relationships, and confidence. Their self-care improved, and they felt more aware and able to recognize their emotional reactions and manage them so they could maintain a positive school climate.

They also talked about feeling less lonely and valuing the connections they made with other principals. We have an educational culture in which principals are expected to work alone, and that is very challenging. CARE gave principals the chance to talk with and support one another.

I recommend that educational leadership policies, structures, and supervisors:

- Support a mentality of self-care. Principals should not be made to feel guilty for taking time to attend to their own well-being.
- Include the well-being of principals in standards for effective leadership, as well as those of students and teachers.
- Cultivate emotional intelligence and social and emotional learning in sustainable professional learning for principals, not just teachers and students.
- Support coaching, mentoring, and networks of school leaders for collaboration.
- Reduce stress and turnover, and increase stability, through longer-term principal assignments. This will foster more satisfying and caring relationships among the whole school community. ■





## RESPONSIVENESS IS KEY TO NEW JERSEY DISTRICT'S LEARNING DESIGN

BY BRUCE "B.C." PRESTON

**T**here are few, if any, who would say that teaching is the same as it was even a decade ago. Many teachers will attest to the fact that more is expected of them and their students. As the teacher's role has changed, so has the school leader's.

After all, if the school leader position — arguably one of the most influential positions in a school district — is not evolving, how could those filling this role successfully establish a reimagined vision for teaching, successfully support teachers in a transition toward realizing that vision, and establish a sense of teacher collective efficacy that the very roles by which many teachers have defined their lives still matter?

Howell Township Public Schools in Monmouth County, New Jersey, has reimagined the roles of teachers, school leaders, and all educational professionals around the concept of a team of learning engineers who, through their students, make the world a better place.

While education has long required teachers to work in groups, professional learning communities (PLCs), teams, and communities of practice to improve their practice, teams of learning engineers go beyond these structures to reimagine the role of leaders, the way they draw on teacher expertise, and the way resources and supports are leveraged so that professional learning meets everyone's needs.

To support this evolution of

learning environments, Howell Township has dramatically reorganized its professional learning around a school-focused, collective, continual sensitivity to learner agency. To best understand how we have reorganized professional learning, it is helpful to look at our shifts alongside what organizational psychology refers to as collective mindfulness in high-reliability organizations (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015).

The five key elements of collective mindfulness within high-reliability organizations are:

- Commitment to resilience;
- Deference to expertise;
- Sensitivity to operations;
- Reluctance to simplify; and
- Preoccupation with failure.

## 1 COMMITMENT TO RESILIENCE

While we have a sound and established vision for our learning environments, we have found that we make more progress toward that vision when our goals and plans are not rigid or highly definitive.

The authors of *Gamestorming* have written, “In knowledge work, we need our goals to be fuzzy” (Gray, Brown, & Macanuso, 2013). Jim Knight and Doug Reeves suggest that “fat plans don’t roll” (2011) and Karl Weick has said, “Most plans are too specific. ... As a result, when you have a plan, you tend not to look for things that disconfirm it” (Coutu, 2003).

In Howell Township, we are not absent of plans. Rather, our plans are small, light, and resilient enough to allow us to constantly assess progress and make midcourse corrections based on what is working and what is not. By moving beyond adherence to deeply detailed district action plans, school leaders are empowered to shift their own plans as best benefits the school’s needs. Structures are in place so the voices of principals advocating for their schools can find the support needed and even influence the direction of the district.

## 2 DEFERENCE TO EXPERTISE

We organize our work around the idea that modern school leadership is not a soloist’s pursuit. Distributive leadership is critical to the way we reimagine the role of school leaders. Just assembling the team of learning engineers is hardly enough;

deferring to their expertise is critical to invigorating a thriving community of learners.

One way to identify and build the capacity of expert teacher leaders is through a structure like a school improvement panel. By state regulations, every school in New Jersey must have a school improvement panel that includes two school administrators and one teacher. Structured to invite a variety of perspectives, each of our schools has a school improvement panel whose core participants represent learning engineers from each grade within the school, special education, Response to Intervention, an instructional coach, and one school administrator.

While other roles and staff will participate as the needs demand, the school improvement panel as a whole is responsible for observing and determining the staff’s professional learning needs and monitoring the fidelity of the observation process. In Howell Township, we saw school improvement panels as an operational boon for our efforts to reorganize professional learning.

Moving far beyond compliance with state law, the school improvement panels have become the lead learning community in each school in our district. Using observation and evaluation data and input from teachers, school improvement panels look for patterns of student performance and instructional practice.

In addition, classroom teachers share their needs and innovative

ideas at their PLCs, which then share them with the school improvement panel. Then the school improvement panels determine the professional learning designs that can best meet each student’s learning needs and each teacher’s instructional needs.

Once we begin the professional learning, we observe changes in classroom practices with an eye for improved student outcomes. This structure empowers teachers — who are the experts of their own needs and innovations — to organize, design, and deliver the best, most appropriate, most relevant professional learning possible. Traditionally, principals research those patterns on their own, but with teams of learning engineers in each school, the principals’ confident deference to teacher expertise makes room for a much more agile and responsive school system.

To find the right teacher leaders with the needed expertise for the school improvement panels, principals must have an intimate knowledge of best instructional practices. Inspired by a leadership book study of Jim Knight’s *Unmistakable Impact: A Partnership Approach for Dramatically Improving Instruction* (2011), our superintendent, Joseph Isola, established a curriculum study series for all principals and vice principals.

Math/science and literacy supervisors facilitate the series, along with guest facilitators selected through participant input. Through this series, which carves out three hours every month for principal professional

learning, principals better understand what constitutes best practices in each subject area, which teacher leaders are using them, and how to support those who are not yet using them consistently.

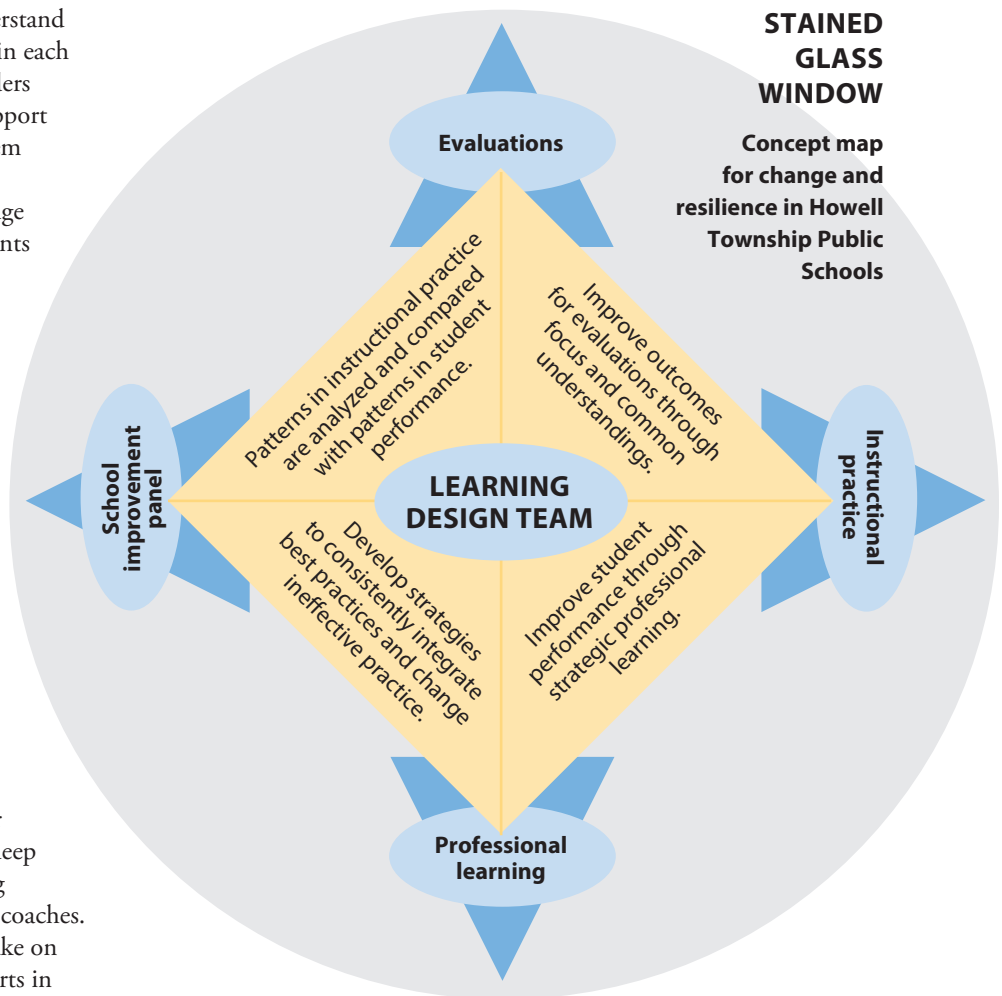
Increasing leaders' knowledge of critical curriculum components increases their ability to better support the expertise represented in districtwide, cross-departmentally developed curriculum.

It is not possible, however, for a principal to be the instructional expert in all areas while meeting all of the competing demands of the role. Having enough knowledge to know what expertise looks like, and how to partner with those who have it, allows principals to strike a mindful balance across those competing demands.

To ensure that expertise for instructional practices is both deep and wide, our teams of learning engineers include instructional coaches. Twelve instructional coaches take on the responsibility of being experts in both instructional practices and adult learning. While they are docked at specific schools and serve on specific school improvement panels, these individuals are considered to be districtwide coaches.

They each possess unique skills or needed content-area expertise. Should a particular skill be in demand at a different school than where a coach is docked, the coach will pick up anchor and set sail. They do so with clear and specific intentions but also great latitude in partnering with each principal to address identified needs and any others unearthed along the way. Creating such flexibility in where the expertise lives provides school leaders with exactly what they need, when they need it, for the specific issues arising in classrooms.

The coaches meet in monthly PLC and coaches meetings. Through



participation in this community of practice, the coaching team is aware of the needs of all 12 schools, and therefore coaches hold unique perspectives on patterns of needs and successes across the district.

While meeting, the coaches cross-pollinate ideas and discuss which skill sets best address which needs. This collaboration helps to sustain a deep and continuously renewed pool of coaching expertise, in turn creating a sense of resilience and efficacy for principals in the belief that they have the right resources, people, and expertise to meet the shifting demands within their schools.

### **3 AWARENESS OF OPERATIONS**

An awareness of operations may not be often associated with providing reliably high-quality

professional learning, but the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) point out the need for allocating appropriate resources, including financial, logistical, human, and other.

To support such professional learning, the operations teams and district leaders must clearly connect all the needed resources and moving parts. If the district doesn't do so, it leaves the principal to connect those parts by himself or herself. This is a near-impossible task and increases the risk of creating conflicting priorities between a school and a district.

A keystone element of success for our district is the way the school improvement panels connect to district leadership. We have depicted this in a concept map we call the Stained Glass Window (see figure above). It visually



outlines the district's support for each school's efforts.

In the figure, notice that learning design team sits in the middle of the map.

We developed the learning design team through collaboration with Rider University and Learning Forward New Jersey, the state affiliate of the national organization, because we realized we needed a districtwide committee to mirror the same decision-making process used by the school improvement panels. The learning design team is therefore the district-level equivalent of the school improvement panel.

This group gathers school patterns of need from each of the school improvement panels and organizes professional learning for the entire district based on the school needs shared from individual classrooms. We have learned that this process gathers the innovations the district needs from individual classrooms, iterates them within schools, and expands them across the district. By restructuring operations this way, all levels of the system work in concert with one another to more efficiently meet learners' goals.

#### 4 RELUCTANCE TO SIMPLIFY

If we oversimplify the complexity and dynamics of a school environment and all that goes into making it successful, school leaders will miss the weak signals of presently small issues, leaving them open to grow into future catastrophes.

Without the proper operational resources and structures in place, beleaguered school leaders are forced to engage in this cycle of simplifying their understandings of the issues they face and the solutions designed to address them and therefore facing more challenges.

In contrast, teams of learning engineers are able to be collectively mindful in their understanding of the dynamics of the learning environments they support, as long as the other

elements outlined above are firmly in place.

Collective mindfulness occurs when staff are able to focus "the scarce commodity of individual attention" on the most pressing needs in any given moment (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 1999). Leaders can defer to the expertise of teams empowering them to respond to those weak signals, unpack and resolve their complexity, then quickly pivot back to success.

In schools with the longest and strongest fidelity of the reimagined roles of learning engineers, we see the greatest growth of collective teacher efficacy, student success, and overall health of the school. Our reflections and data suggest that collectively mindful schools have high levels of collective teacher efficacy and, in keeping with John Hattie's (Visible Learning, n.d.) research, those schools are also experiencing the greatest gains in learner success, both adult and child.

#### 5 PREOCCUPATION WITH FAILURE

Collective mindfulness literature describes a preoccupation with failure as actively and mindfully looking for the weakest present signals of catastrophic future failures. This may seem strange or counterintuitive and somewhat depressing for thriving schools. The reality is, we educators are always looking for failure and remediating it.

In Howell Township, our preoccupation with failure means assuming that failure is inevitable, assuming that failure is a system issue and not a person issue, being confident that we can spot failure early through our teams of learning engineers, and being even more confident that failure can be solved through our system of reliably high-quality professional learning.

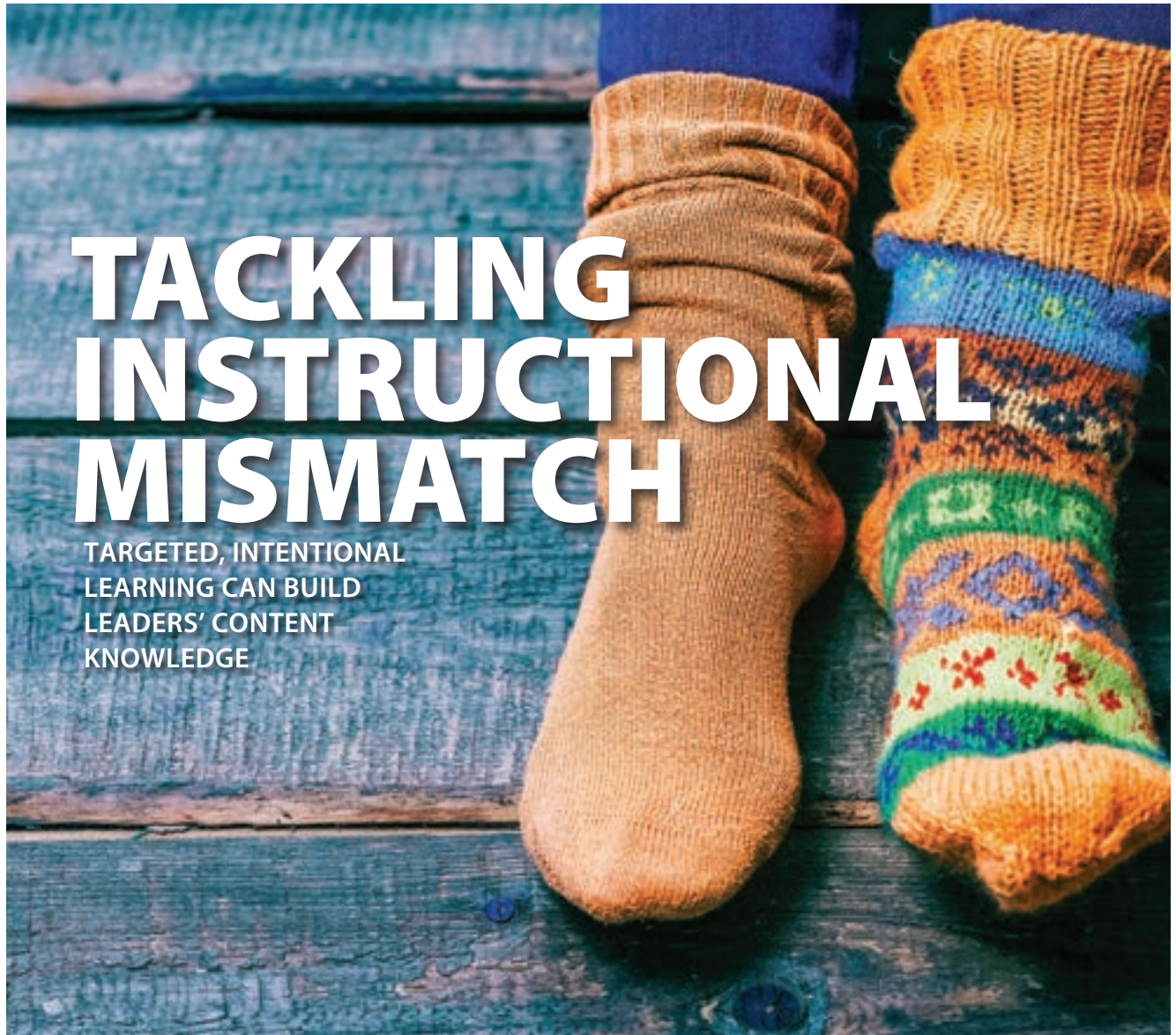
In having this preoccupation with failure, we fail forward. Our systems, operations, and learning designs are not designed to avoid mistakes, but to know better how to make them and

learn from them.

The best innovations come from classrooms and teachers, when they are given the opportunity. Having structures in place so classroom-level innovations can support school and district strategies has supported our school leaders in being far more agile in their ability to meet the demands they face and improve student outcomes. There is still work to do, but we are confident that our collective efforts will benefit every student.

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# TACKLING INSTRUCTIONAL MISMATCH

TARGETED, INTENTIONAL  
LEARNING CAN BUILD  
LEADERS' CONTENT  
KNOWLEDGE

BY SARAH QUEBEC FUENTES AND JO BETH JIMERSON

**A**t the heart of effective school leadership are robust instructional leadership practices. An emphasis on instructional leadership is neither new nor simple.

We've spent the last several years talking with teachers, school leaders, and content experts about how they engage in instructional leadership and

the challenges with which they struggle. One takeaway from this work is that much, if not most, of the time, leaders are engaging in their work within a context of instructional mismatch.

Most leaders end up working either with teachers in grade levels they did not teach (e.g. a secondary teacher who becomes an elementary school administrator) or with teachers in

unfamiliar content areas (e.g. a former mathematics teacher who supervises social studies and English language arts teachers).

This was the case for one of our research participants, whom we will call Danelle Richards. (Participants' real names are confidential, in keeping with our research project's protocols.) Richards, an elementary principal

(and former secondary science teacher) told us she felt very vulnerable and unqualified when she worked with teachers on reading instruction — an area of double mismatch (grade level and content area).

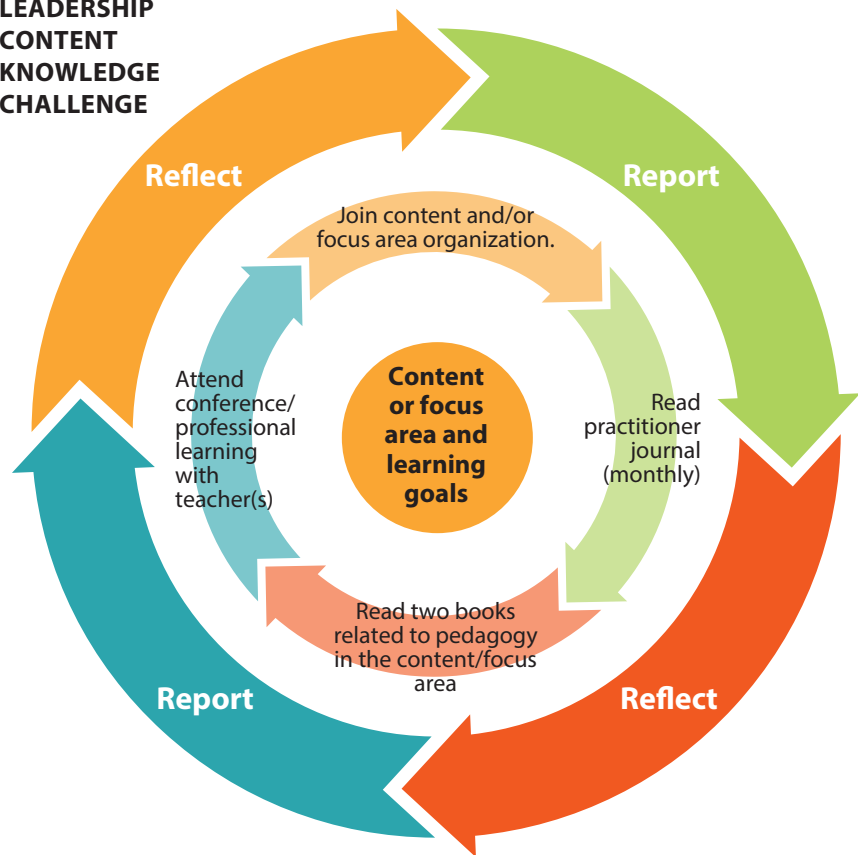
Particularly in her early years, she was “very hesitant to provide feedback for subject areas” where mismatch was prominent. Other leaders we’ve worked with have used the words *uncomfortable*, *unqualified*, *hesitant*, *vulnerable*, *intimidated*, and *anxious* to describe how they feel when called on to work with teachers in areas of mismatch.

In such cases, leaders may have difficulties participating in the kinds of rich dialogue and feedback that could lead to substantial improvements in teacher practice and student learning.

The challenge for leaders wanting to bridge this mismatch gap and maximize impact as an instructional leader is to engage in what we call targeted and intentional *instructional learnership*. Instructional learnership means building knowledge about content-specific teaching practices in a way that is meaningful, ongoing, transparent, and draws on the resources and expertise of colleagues.

A focus on intentional and in-depth instructional learnership is not yet widespread, perhaps because of the complexities involved with school leadership and competing demands. But we believe it is a critical element in crafting and supporting effective learning opportunities for faculty, staff, and students, and we have created a structure to help school leaders build it.

### LEADERSHIP CONTENT KNOWLEDGE CHALLENGE



### LEADERSHIP CONTENT KNOWLEDGE

Although leaders with whom we’ve worked often noted mismatch as a challenge, few talk about intentional efforts to seek learning opportunities in these areas of mismatch. Some stress the importance of the principal as lead learner but describe their learning as focused primarily on general leadership strategies.

Of course, leaders cannot be expected to know everything about content-area instruction, but all leaders can know something about various content areas. To build this knowledge,

leaders can benefit from the concept of leadership content knowledge (Stein & Nelson, 2003).

In contrast to pedagogical content knowledge, which is the unique knowledge base that exists for each subject area at the intersection of content and pedagogy (Shulman, 1986, 1987), leadership content knowledge focuses on the big, overarching ideas in a discipline. For instance, a mathematics teacher’s pedagogical content knowledge should include a depth and breadth of understanding across the range of effective teaching practices specific to mathematics.

In contrast, a principal’s leadership content knowledge involves familiarity with several effective mathematics teaching practices, such as the incorporation of high-level tasks, purposeful connections across representations, and the facilitation of discourse (NCTM, 2014).

When working in an area of mismatch, leaders often opt to focus on content-neutral or “crossover” practices. For instance, middle school assistant principal Jade Turner (a pseudonym), describing her work in an area of mismatch, confided, “I am kind of along for the ride with the students as opposed to looking through the lens of how [teachers] can refine their specific practices. ... [I ask], ‘Have you tried refining your essential question? Have you tried using hands-on activities? Have you tried students collaborating more?’ They’re just basic strategies.” This fits with what many school leaders tell us: “Good teaching is good teaching.”

Focusing on global practices, like essential questions and formative assessment strategies, is indeed an important component of instructional leadership. However, as Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, and Wiliam (2004) noted in work on formative assessment, “generic strategies could only go so far” (p. 16). They go on to explain:

“Choosing a good question requires a detailed knowledge of the subject. ... Furthermore, such pedagogical content knowledge is essential in interpreting responses. That is, what students say will contain clues to aspects of their thinking that may require attention, but picking up on these clues requires a thorough knowledge of common difficulties in learning the subject” (Black et al., 2004, pp. 16-17).

For example, Milo Collins, a secondary mathematics teacher, talked about the conversations he enjoyed with a math-savvy administrator, noting, “[asking] ‘How do you build a child’s understanding of functions?’ ... is so much more meaningful than ‘Did I do

<b>CONTENT, GRADE-LEVEL, AND NEEDS-SPECIFIC RESOURCES</b>	
<b>Organization</b>	<b>Journals</b>
National Council of Teachers of Mathematics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mathematics Teacher: Learning and Teaching PK-12</li> </ul>
National Council for the Social Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Studies and the Young Learner</li> <li>• Social Education</li> </ul>
National Science Teaching Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Science and Children</li> <li>• Science Scope</li> <li>• The Science Teacher</li> </ul>
National Council of Teachers of English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English Journal</li> <li>• Voices from the Middle</li> </ul>
International Literacy Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Reading Teacher</li> </ul>
National Art Education Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Art Education Journal</li> </ul>
Music Teachers National Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• American Music Teacher</li> </ul>
Educational Theatre Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dramatics</li> </ul>
National Association for Sport and Physical Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategies: A Journal for Physical and Sport Education</li> </ul>
SHAPE America — Society of Health and Physical Educators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journal of Physical Education, Recreation &amp; Dance</li> </ul>
National Association for Bilingual Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perspectives</li> <li>• NABE Journal of Research and Practice</li> </ul>
Council for Exceptional Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TEACHING Exceptional Children</li> </ul>
American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Language Educator</li> </ul>
National Association for the Education of Young Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young Children</li> <li>• Teaching Young Children</li> <li>• Voices of Practitioners</li> </ul>
National Association for Gifted Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching for High Potential</li> </ul>

a thumbs-up seven minutes ago?”

Attention to crossover practices can be practical, but a blending of crossover practices with leadership content knowledge, as Collins’ situation illustrates, provides a platform for rich dialogues between teachers and school leaders.

**POWERING UP FEEDBACK**

To help leaders build leadership content knowledge and overcome instructional mismatch, we propose the Leadership Content Knowledge Challenge. This challenge invites leaders to choose one area of mismatch (e.g. mathematics, arts, or bilingual

education) and learn — deeply and publicly — about instruction in that area over the next year.

Leaders begin the challenge by talking with instructional experts (e.g. instructional coaches/specialists and teacher leaders on their campus or elsewhere) to identify key organizations, readings, conferences, and resources considered central to the discipline and reflective of effective practices.

They then set learning goals in consultation with these experts, align key activities and readings (see the figure on p. 33), and share their challenge plan with faculty and staff. Individually or in concert with a

professional learning network, leaders enact the plan, embedding regular reflection and opportunities to report out learning throughout the year.

As an example, suppose a former high school geography teacher now serving as a middle school principal chooses to build capacity in mathematics education. After visiting with a district mathematics coach and developing learning goals, she joins the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and reads *Mathematics Teacher: Learning and Teaching PK-12*, a journal that comes with the membership, throughout the year.

She also commits to reading two books recommended by the mathematics coach — *Principles to Actions: Ensuring Mathematical Success for All* (NCTM, 2014) and *Mathematical Mindsets* (Boaler, 2016). Throughout the year, she is intentional about spending time in the classrooms of mathematics teacher leaders to learn more about their pedagogical choices.

Upon recommendation from the mathematics coach, the geography teacher-turned-principal registers for two days of professional learning she will attend with grade-level mathematics teacher leaders, through which she receives a copy of *Building a Math-Positive Culture* (Seeley, 2016). She presents her learning plan to her faculty early in the fall semester.

She also keeps a reflective journal, noting the ways in which her learning about mathematics instruction intersects with her walk-throughs and observations at the campus, and reports on her progress to the faculty several times during the year.

She realizes that, counter to assumptions that learning from and with teachers may make leaders appear unqualified, making her learning transparent actually builds credibility and establishes relationships built on trust and mutual development (Lochmiller, 2019).

The table on p. 34 lists examples of content- and program-specific organizations and associated journals.

## Attention to crossover practices can be practical, but a blending of crossover practices with leadership content knowledge provides a platform for rich dialogues between teachers and school leaders.

### BROKERING CONNECTIONS

Leaders who undertake the challenge can not only enhance their ability to layer rich instructional feedback atop crossover (or content-neutral) practices, but also become more effective brokers of information and resources to support teacher growth.

School leaders who have leadership content knowledge are more likely to detect when lively teaching may mask the absence of rigorous instruction (see Bauml, 2016).

They are able to spot teachers who need additional supports, but who may not recognize that need on their own. And being able to recognize the needs of exemplary teachers — via observation or dialogue — is similarly important.

### CYCLES OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEARNERSHIP

Ideally, the Leadership Content Knowledge Challenge will reap benefits that lead to a second cycle, in a new content area, and on to a third, and beyond. Leaders need not limit themselves to content areas subject to state or federal testing requirements.

Instruction in the arts and health/wellness, as well as in special program areas (e.g. special education, gifted education, bilingual programming) should not be overlooked. In this way, instructional mismatch becomes an on-ramp for rich learning across disciplines and an opportunity to engage as lead and co-learner with an eye toward long-term instructional improvement.

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# YOUR VOICE MAILBOX IS FULL — OF LEARNING

PRINCIPALS COLLABORATE THROUGH PHONE APP

BY ERIN AXELSEN, LORIE CRISTOFARO, AND JILL GEOCARIS

**D**o you ever laugh as you look at your schedules and wonder how you will fit this next vital meeting in an already time-challenged week? As educational

leaders, we have schedules full of responsibilities, meetings, and events. With all of those urgent demands, it can be a challenge to find the time to fuel one's passions and grow professionally.

It also becomes increasingly difficult as we move up the administrative hierarchy to find role-alike colleagues to connect with and learn from. Unlike teachers who have other teachers to network with throughout their school

## Technology is helping education leaders overcome this isolation and connect with learning partners and communities.



day, administrators do not always have direct colleagues in the building and may not have others to connect with in their district or region. As a result, educational leaders are often left to their own devices to identify opportunities for support and collaboration in the pursuit of professional growth.

Technology is helping education leaders overcome this isolation and connect with learning partners and communities. We and our collaborators have leveraged a mobile app that allows us to engage in book discussions either in real time or asynchronously so that we can give professional learning the time it deserves.

This structure provides many of the benefits of an in-person discussion group, such as building relationships and practicing reflection with other trusted professionals, with the added time flexibility for busy professionals.

Beyond meetings, the three of us — an assistant superintendent, innovative adult learning coordinator, and instructional coordinator in the Chicago suburbs — wanted to be part of a collaborative that would focus on sustained professional growth. Although we had long participated in consortiums with educators from various school districts in the Chicago suburbs, we often found ourselves at gatherings caught up in the minutiae of our jobs rather than focused on the richer adaptive growth experiences offered by the group, which Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky (2002) have emphasized in *Leadership on the Line*.

Fortunately, we connected with

two principals at suburban Chicago high schools, Janice Schwarze and Ben Collins, who invited a group of other like-minded school leaders to start a leadership coaching cohort for school and district administrators.

This group met four times in person throughout the school year and matched participants into pairs who coached one another, focusing on personalized, job-embedded learning. Partners met on average three to six times a year, using a variety of methods, including phone calls, email, and technology to reflect on and grow their practice.

To build on the success of this work after the first year, the group embarked on a book study over the summer. Collaborating across districts provided connections to other school leaders with varied experience and roles. Instead of only being exposed to one district's vision, jargon, and setting, this book study broke through that isolation to cultivate meaningful connections for participants fostering professional and personal growth beyond one's district lens.

We knew it would be difficult to get together in person over the summer — it had been hard enough to coordinate schedules during the school year — so we brainstormed how to use technology to further our goals. Janice Schwarze had been a huge proponent of a mobile app called Voxer during the leadership coaching experience, and we knew many members of the group were using it successfully as a convenient way to connect with coaching partners.

Voxer is a free mobile app that allows users to quickly leave voice messages for another individual or group of individuals. The app notifies members when someone is leaving a message for them, and the user can either click in and listen to it live (as if using a walkie-talkie) or listen to it at a later time. This structure was a great fit for our goal of group book discussions and for the challenge of coordinating schedules.

### A FLEXIBLE STRUCTURE FOR COLLABORATION

Voxer allowed us to hold a discussion at times that are convenient for each individual, yet still facilitate a conversation that builds on one another's ideas. In fact, several members of our group participate in the Voxer discussion in the car during their commute to or from work. The Voxer discussion resembles a live, in-person discussion about a book, even when members don't all participate at the same time.

For the first year, leaders of the group selected the books, choosing titles that would provide professional practice insights and elicit questions and discussion. Then the three of us, as facilitators, divided participants into three small discussion groups to keep communication manageable. Each of us led a group of five to six people in discussing a different book. We also selected dates for chapter discussions and managed communication with our group.

There were no set norms for Voxer

groups, except for confidentiality and expected professionalism of all involved, especially because there might be educational leaders from a variety of roles in one district serving in the same Voxer groups. It was imperative that people felt they could speak freely and candidly.

Book chapter discussions often began with the group’s facilitator sharing a quote or reaction to the chapter the group read for that week. The group would then break down the book by chapters and assign a chapter or two to discuss each week, and group members took the lead in facilitating one of those assigned chapters. Other members of the group would respond to that initial idea, add new ideas, or pose questions to the group related to the weekly assigned chapter(s).

One great advantage of Voxer is that participants don’t need to wait for an upcoming meeting to share an idea. As you read the book and something comes to mind, you can quickly grab your phone and share your idea or ask your question immediately.

Because this format uses asynchronous communication, one may not hear a group member reply to a question or ideas for several days. The participants therefore have to work at making sure the conversation still feels like a discussion by responding to and building on other’s ideas rather than simply just recording one’s own thoughts for others to listen to.

Sometimes life or work overtook a member’s schedule and he or she was unable to contribute. When this happened to many participants in an electronic book study, the facilitator would step in to continue the discussion and re-engage the group.

Another important feature about Voxer is that a message cannot be deleted unless you pay an additional fee for an upgrade on the app. When sending your thoughts to your group members via the app, it operates as a stream of consciousness, so you cannot go back, delete, and re-record. In this sense, it is very much like a real

conversation and requires members to use the same etiquette as in a conversation.

### **SELF-DIRECTED YET COLLABORATIVE LEARNING**

The Voxer book study is an opportunity for adult learners to engage in a self-directed yet collaborative learning experience. It is aligned with Malcolm Knowles’ (1977) principles of andragogy, or the art and science of adult learning.

Andragogy theory states that adults are most interested in learning when it has immediate relevance and impact in their work (Merriam, 2001), and in our book study, the readings and discussions are connected to our daily work as school leaders. It also follows the principles of self-direction and learner-centeredness, which are critical components in adult learning theory (Orey, 2012).

Reflection is an important part of this work. Knowles’ theory prescribes that participants evaluate their learning process (Knowles, 1977), and other adult learning research, like Donald Schon’s reflective practice theory, expects that practitioners “become aware of their implicit knowledge base and learn from their experiences” (Schon, 1987).

Throughout the book discussions, participants were reflective about their own practice and bias so they could determine areas of their own practice that were reinforced by the reading and other areas that they wanted to change or alter. And we, the facilitators, reflected and solicited feedback from participants for the purposes of learning and improving.

The first summer book study was successful enough that we did it again during a second summer with returning and new participants, and we used this feedback to modify its structure the next year. We plan to continue this book study format as long as we have participants.

As education innovator George Couros (2015) reminds us, “Innovation

is not reserved for the few; it is something we will all need to embrace if we are to move forward.” Educators need to not only embody this as they think of the use of technology in their classrooms and schools but also how they can grow as a professional. We urge all to take a risk and think how they can leverage the resources available to them to meet their own professional needs.

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# LIFT AND LEAD

WHAT IT TAKES TO THRIVE AS A LEADER OF A TURNAROUND SCHOOL

BY ANDREA K. RORRER, JANICE BRADLEY, AND CORI GROTH

**L**eaders in turnaround schools have unique professional learning prospects and needs. The demands and scrutiny in turnaround schools may be more intense than in other schools, as the changes necessary to improve often require attention to and interrogation of many factors, including current leadership, teaching, and learning methods. Consequently, our work with leaders in turnaround schools has revealed the need for greater attention to the conscious development of resilience.

The Leadership and Inquiry for Turnaround (LIFT) initiative in Utah supports turnaround leaders' development and builds resilience and capacity of school leadership



Andrea Rorrer, director of the Utah Education Policy Center, addresses cohort leaders and leadership teams from schools identified as turnaround schools during the group's meeting at the University of Utah in July.

teams to thrive and lead their schools to improvement, even in the face of major challenges and adversity. Here is how professional learning can help mitigate the challenges of leading in a turnaround school through competence and confidence.

## WHAT IS LIFT?

Turnaround school leaders include a spectrum of experience, including those newly selected and returning principals. They share the challenge of making significant improvements to teaching and learning in their schools.

To address this challenge, staff at the Utah Education Policy Center, in

partnership with WestEd, developed LIFT, a research-based professional learning network opportunity for turnaround leaders in Utah. LIFT participants come from diverse settings, including urban and rural, charter and traditional, and elementary and secondary schools.

Originally designed for principals, LIFT now includes school leaders and their teams, which typically include assistant principals, instructional coaches, and other teacher leaders.

Most LIFT participants have been meeting in a community of practice for the past three years, four times per year. In two-day quarterly meetings,

participants engage in collaborative experiences to facilitate, scaffold, and enhance their learning and professional growth.

Meetings include a range of learning and application experiences to deepen knowledge and skills in areas such as the Utah Education Policy Center’s leadership principles, effective instruction, data and research use, organizational leadership and change, and the Center on School Turnaround’s four domains of rapid improvement (The Center on School Turnaround, 2017), to name a few.

Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) serve as a foundation for LIFT, especially the Learning Designs standard. LIFT planning ensures that quarterly learning sessions include active engagement, modeling, reflection, application, and opportunities for self-assessment that support changes in knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for turnaround leaders.

We focus on leaders’ range of learning needs; explicit actions needed for learning transfer; tools and strategies for supporting implementation that include communication, feedback, and coaching; and assessments of participants’ understanding and application of learning (Learning Forward, 2011).

For example, an important skill for leaders is how to develop structures and processes for effective feedback to improve instructional practices. To address this need, identified through ongoing feedback from participants, LIFT provides multiple opportunities at the quarterly learning sessions for LIFT participants to learn about effective feedback practices, actively engage with their own and other school teams to practice techniques, and plan for how the feedback strategies will be implemented in their own schools.

LIFT also provides opportunities for participants to see the feedback strategies modeled, including structured protocols, to reflect on implementation

## WHAT ARE TURNAROUND SCHOOLS?

Turnaround schools are those generally:

- Identified as low-performing in student achievement or other indicators (e.g. graduation rates) by state or federal accountability systems;
- Required to make significant, rapid improvements in student achievement; and
- Expected to maintain the growth and upward trajectory in achievement and performance for all students.

and identify areas for continued growth.

## LIFT AND RESILIENCE

LIFT was premised on the belief that leaders can reclaim turnaround by engaging in building competence and confidence in self and others to improve and achieve effective practices that create conditions for success.

From our research, we have learned that reclaiming turnaround “requires understanding where schools are, what got them there, and the requisite need, or ‘why,’ for change, including how capacity schoolwide can occur in a systemic and systematic way. . . . A defining moment in reclaiming turnaround requires grappling with the organizational identity of a school and understanding the role of leaders in cultivating turnaround as an opportunity for improvement. To this end, an ability to first identify as a school in need of turnaround and then identify as a school capable of turnaround becomes a pivot point to reclaim turnaround as a leverage for change” (Park, Groth, Bradley, & Rorrer, 2018, p. 15).

Resilience requires more than the ability to hang in there or outlive a reform. It includes the ability to increase competence and thrive when faced with struggles (Gordon, 1995). To guide our work, we draw on London’s (1997) description of the five abilities associated with professional resilience, as they are essential for leaders who seek to reclaim school turnaround (Park et al., 2018):

1. Adapt to changing circumstances;

2. Welcome job and organizational changes;
3. Embrace working with new and different people;
4. Exhibit self-confidence; and
5. Exhibit willingness to take risks.

## RESILIENCE AND COMPETENCE

We’ve learned that resilience and competence have a complex and interdependent relationship. In a turnaround setting, it is easy for competence to be described narrowly as raising student test scores.

We acknowledge that this is an important outcome. And we recognize that the ability to create conditions for success depends on resilience and competence. Here, we rely on harnessing the power that comes with understanding competence in the context of the stages of learning.

Noel Burch illuminated four stages of learning: unconscious incompetence (unawareness), conscious incompetence (awareness), conscious competence (learning), and unconscious competence (mastery) (Adams, n.d.). In LIFT, the goal is for leaders to move from nascent awareness of self and content to full-fledged practice integration.

Specifically, these stages of learning have served as an avenue to understanding where one is starting and how one can improve both cognitive and functional competence — the ability to both know what to do and capability to do it (Cheetham & Chivers, 1996).

LIFT intentionally attends to these competency stages throughout the learning experiences, including

opportunities for leaders to self-assess, build their competence in specific skills, dispositions, and knowledge, and bridge from current actions to actions that support their improvement goals.

Moreover, LIFT experiences allow leaders to develop the ability to adapt and modify their actions to be more effective within a shifting, and sometimes volatile, environment. Here are four examples of how LIFT learning experiences support leaders to be effective and resilient leaders.

● **Build confidence through competence and competence through learning.**

Often, we hear that what a leader needs to be more effective is more confidence. As noted previously, sometimes confidence occurs even where competence doesn't reside.

Through observations and feedback from participants, we have learned that resilience comes from feeling confident and self-assured in oneself to address challenges, and that, in turn, comes from competence and the ability to address challenges effectively.

LIFT's structure supports a leader's focus on the school's problem of practice. We use actionable strategies and tools, whole-group engagement, structured conversations with school teams, and facilitated conversations in differentiated learning hubs to develop and scaffold leaders' knowledge, skills, and application of effective leadership practice.

For example, the quarterly learning sessions dedicate time to continuous development of the leadership principles within the four domains of rapid improvement to expand participants' habits of practice for application in their own settings.

● **Cultivate a professional leader identity.**

Resilience requires embracing a professional leader identity. At LIFT, activities are intentionally designed to develop change leaders, where we encourage and support school leaders

to make choices with others that lead to improvement in teaching and learning.

Learning experiences build capacity to broaden perspectives and develop both individual and collective leadership identities. This includes developing the disposition, actions, and language of a learning leader who has the ability and capability to deal with ambiguity, gain new knowledge and skills, and promote active adult engagement.

Regardless of school conditions (e.g. uncertainty, unstructured school systems and procedures, fast-paced changing conditions, and low expectations for students' academic performance) before a participant's appointment as leader in a turnaround school or the designation of the school as turnaround, LIFT fosters the agency and action a leader may take.

Through ongoing participation, principals increasingly gained the competence and confidence as learning leaders who embraced ambiguity and systems thinking, gained knowledge from research and best practices, built the capacity to empower others, and used inquiry and reflection to foster collaborative learning.

● **Develop adaptive leaders.**

LIFT uses activities such as role-plays, cases, and consultancies to develop agile skills that are applicable in challenging environments. The role-plays and cases reflect the current problems of practice leaders face while supporting them to use the tools and strategies they are learning in LIFT to practice responses to real-life scenarios.

Individuals develop adaptive abilities to transform challenges to goals and outcomes. For example, participants build communication strategies where they identify common patterns of unproductive conversation and use moves to turn unproductive conversations into productive ones.

The System for Analyzing Verbal Interaction (Benjamin, Yeager, & Simon, 2012; Simon & Agazarian, 2000) provides a systematic, objective analysis of what makes conversations

**ABOUT LIFT**

To date, LIFT has been funded by the Utah State Board of Education, initially through enactment of legislation in 2015 that identified schools whose performance was in the bottom 3% according to the state's accountability system. These schools were given up to three years to improve student performance.

The first cohort of 26 turnaround schools was identified in fall 2015 and included both charters and traditional public schools. Many of these schools were previously or simultaneously identified as Title I priority or focus schools, as part of existing federal accountability policies.

Five additional school cohorts were identified in 2017 and eight more in 2019. All schools identified as turnaround are invited to participate in LIFT.

LIFT uses continuous planning, self-assessments, and improvement cycles, promotes active learning and engagement with models, and builds collective responsibility. LIFT's professional learning design is:

- Grounded in systems theory;
- Research-based and data-informed;
- Adult learning-centered and need-based;
- Focused on learning community;
- Collaboratively planned;
- Job-embedded;
- Scaffolded and sustained; and
- Aligned to professional learning, leader, and educator standards.

succeed or fail. Learning effective communication strategies that can be used across multiple contexts and settings increases a leader's ability to be agile and proactively maintain positive momentum with groups and teams.

School leaders have found the tool particularly helpful as they work to develop sound methods of effective, clear communication within their schools with multiple stakeholders.

● **Develop capacity to frame and message change.**

LIFT leaders have opportunities to develop their capacity to frame their turnaround efforts in ways that promote positive visions for student access, confront disbelief, and use evidence in continuous improvement cycles that takes time to implement over the long haul (Johnson, Uline, & Perez, 2017; Park, Daly, and Guerra, 2012).

Our partnership demonstrates that reclaiming turnaround is a process requiring leaders and their schools to understand where schools are, what got them there, and the requisite need, or why, for change, including how capacity schoolwide can occur in a systemic and systematic way (Park et al., 2018).

Through regular engagement in planning with tools and templates, as well as sharing with and receiving feedback from peers about successes, highlights, and areas needing momentum, LIFT leaders increase their ability to frame and message for change.

**LEADING TURNAROUND**

Without question, leading turnaround takes heart and soul. We have discovered that knowing what to do and how to do it is necessary but insufficient in turnaround schools.

Turnaround requires resilience — the ability to adapt to changing circumstances, embrace change, build self-confidence, and take the necessary risks (London, 1997) — to ensure that educators create conditions for all students to have access to an excellent and equitable educational experience.

**Without question, leading turnaround takes heart and soul.**

Professional resilience would benefit all school leaders. For now, though, we have learned that professional resilience permits leaders in turnaround schools to reclaim turnaround as “both a form of resistance to the deficit orientation it now holds and a form of empowerment” (Park et al., 2018, p. 29).

In an era marked by high turnover and hesitation to become or remain a leader of a turnaround school, professional learning — particularly opportunities for leaders to learn with and from others — is imperative. LIFT, which promotes individual learning within a collective community of practice, is one example of professional learning that promotes resilience and competence in tandem. Leaders who move from surviving to thriving in turnaround schools want and need this type of professional learning.

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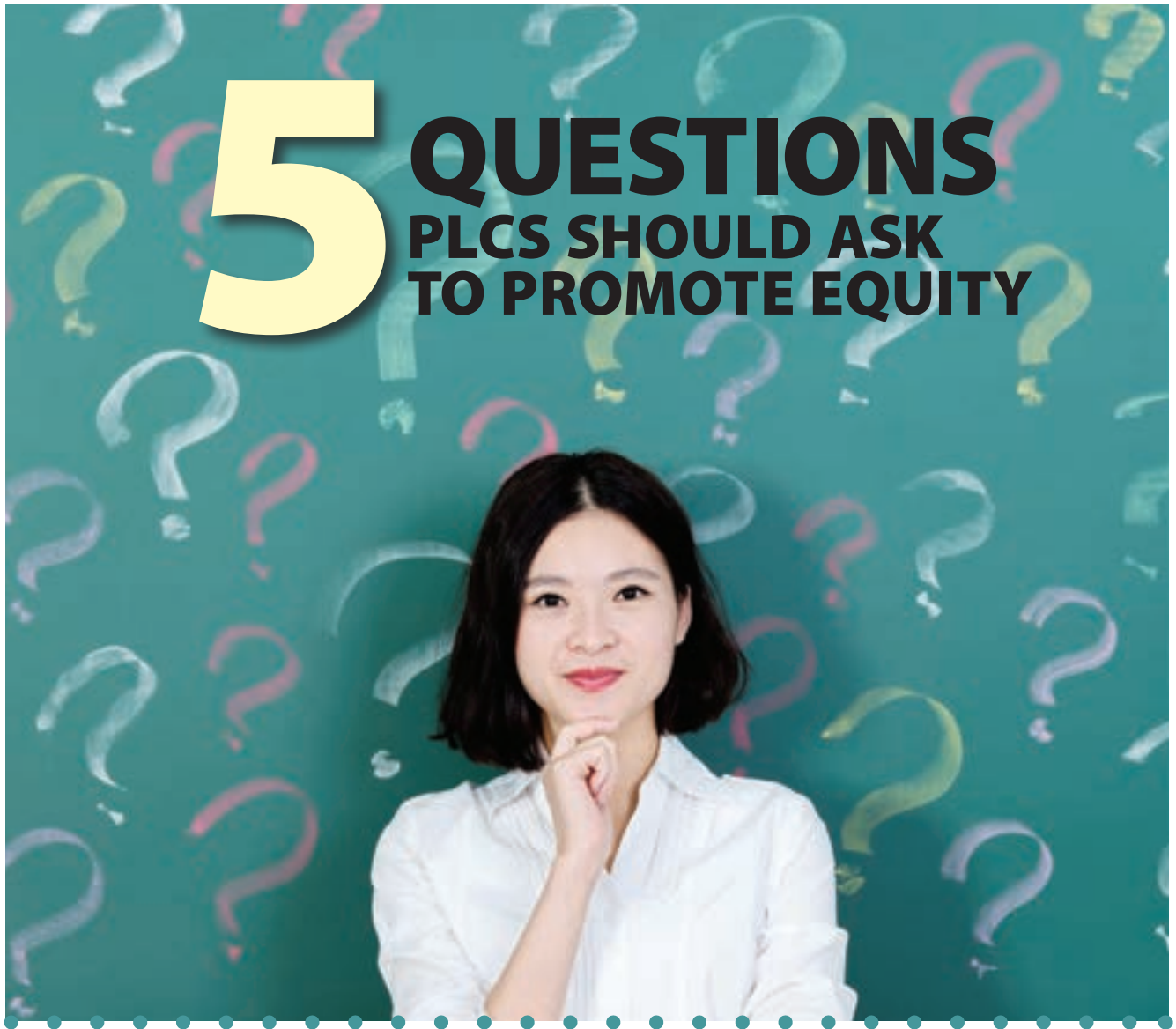
# IDEAS

## LIGHT THE PATH TO EQUITY

**“P**LCs may not be fulfilling the promise of equity, especially for students who continue to face opportunity gaps and those who have historically been marginalized. How can we light the path to equity by refocusing PLCs so that they are more than a series of meetings and result in real change for the students who need it most?”

— “5 questions PLCs should ask to promote equity”

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## 5 QUESTIONS PLCS SHOULD ASK TO PROMOTE EQUITY

BY DOUGLAS FISHER, NANCY FREY, AND JOHN ALMARODE

**H**ow might the work of professional learning communities (PLCs) focus on the changes necessary to ensure that *all* students are engaged, inspired, and successful?

Despite current efforts, some groups of students are not making expected

progress to meet grade-level standards and achieve at the highest levels. PLCs present a rich opportunity to improve instruction, as there is evidence that teacher teams, collaborating together, impact the learning outcomes of students (e.g. Reeves, 2010).

But PLCs may not be fulfilling the

promise of equity, especially for students who continue to face opportunity gaps and those who have historically been marginalized. How can we light the path to equity by refocusing PLCs so that they are more than a series of meetings and result in real change for the students who need it most?

We developed five discussion questions that we believe allow educator teams to put equity front and center in their collaborative conversations (Fisher, Frey, Almarode, Flores, & Nagel, 2020):

- Where are we going?
- Where are we now?
- How do we move learning forward?
- What did we learn today?
- Who benefited and who did not benefit?

Here we consider each of these questions and how PLCs and the students they serve can benefit from them. Although we do not think that PLCs are singularly sufficient to ensure that equity is achieved, PLCs — when done well — can drive changes to many facets of teaching and learning and seed larger change.



### WHERE ARE WE GOING?

This first question is deceptively simple. It asks teams to consider the learning goals and trajectory for students.

To some, it may seem that this simple question has nothing to do with equity. But in our experience, teams often plan based on their current and unexamined beliefs about students' ability and potential. Often, they have not considered that their expectations, as expressed through the lessons they design, can magnify inequitable outcomes.

When teams plan lessons well below grade level, students do not have a chance of achieving at the highest level of learning, even if they meet the specific expectations of the lesson. As an example, when a 5th-grade team plans lessons based on 3rd-grade expectations, they produce 6th graders who are ready for 4th grade. As a result, students' growth in learning over an extended period of time will be less than what is both expected and possible.

But when teams engage in conversations about what students need to learn, they surface expectations that become visible to each member of the team. The question “where are we going?” can guide PLC conversations so that expectations become aligned to grade-level expectations and team members identify barriers to learning that need to be removed as well as supports that need to be enacted to ensure appropriate levels of learning.



### WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Equity demands that teachers build on what students already know and fill any gaps in learning opportunities. When teams discuss the current performance levels of their students, they are often confronted with the reality that some students have not had equitable opportunities to learn to grade-level standards, and they are called on to accept responsibility to close the gap. One of the main

## DEFINING EQUITY

**W**e do not limit our thinking about equity to achievement gaps. In fact, we have argued that equity is more expansive than what tests can measure (e.g. Smith, Frey, Pumpian, & Fisher, 2017). We have set our sights on ensuring that all students are engaged, inspired, and successful.

Our definition, developed in partnership with leaders from San Diego Unified School District, Chula Vista Elementary School District, Sweetwater Union High School District, and San Diego State University, specifies that equity in education:

- **RECOGNIZES** that every student comes to school with a unique identity profile that is too often impacted by racism, bias, or bigotry;
- **OCCURS** as a result of sensitive, courageous, and creative conversations and actions;
- **REQUIRES** the distribution and redistribution of resources and initiatives based on individual and group needs derived from multiple sources of qualitative and quantitative data; and
- **LEADS** to engaged, inspired, and successful learners.

# IDEAS

functions of a PLC should be to identify these gaps and strategies for closing them.

Consider one effective high school English team we worked with. The team was discussing students' writing using claims, evidence, and reasons. As part of the group's discussion, members noted that students had mastered how to write a claim, but that their evidence centered on personal experiences and not textual evidence.

This allowed them to plan how to focus their instruction on the missing link: using evidence. As one team member said, "We really don't need to start with claims. I mean, look at their work on the preassessment. They are really good at this. Way better than the group last year. But the evidence they use is all from their own lives. I get that, but we need to help them draw evidence from other sources."



## HOW DO WE MOVE LEARNING FORWARD?

It might seem obvious that PLCs should focus on effective instructional practices. But this is more complex than it sounds.

It requires more than saying, for example, "We'll use reciprocal teaching." It involves a range of detailed instructional decisions that teachers make about *how* to implement reciprocal teaching and ensure that this approach meets the needs of all students.

When teams fail to discuss the specifics of how to move learning forward, some well-meaning teachers end up using ineffective approaches, like assigning worksheets or doing all of the work for students. Such strategies are more commonly experienced by lower-achieving students, even though they are most in need of effective instruction. According to Good (1987), lower-achieving students:

- Receive less wait time, praise, and feedback;
- Are seated farther away from

the teacher;

- Have less eye contact from the teacher; and
- Have fewer friendly interactions with the teacher.

How do PLC team members access and share the knowledge to change these patterns? Often, this professional knowledge is in the room and should be shared. If someone has a really effective way of teaching something, he or she should share it, and the team should capitalize on it. In addition, the team should investigate evidence-based practices, especially if team members encounter a new challenge or are not sure what might work in a certain situation.

In addition, teams should discuss the cultural relevancy of the materials they use to teach students the content. Teams should focus on the responsiveness of their pedagogy, asking themselves if the lessons they have designed honor the experiences that students bring to school.



## WHAT DID WE LEARN TODAY?

This question centers on the learning that occurs through the PLC. This should encompass both students' and teachers' learning. The focus of what was learned today is both outward — our students — and inward — ourselves.

Teams need to discuss what they learned from students and what they plan to do about it. This involves systems for checking for understanding and then using student performance to guide next steps instruction.

For example, a middle school math team wanted to know if students had increased their knowledge of probability. As one team member said, "We can give them a problem set to do, but I am more interested in hearing their thinking. Maybe we should add a writing task and also ask students to retell their thinking. Then I think we'll really know what they learned and what we learned from the process."

Based on what they learned from their students, this team of teachers made decisions about reteaching and extension tasks. They decided what they needed to focus on with the whole class as well as small group and individual instruction that needed to occur for specific students.



## WHO BENEFITED AND WHO DID NOT?

To deliver on the promise of equity, it is not enough to discuss students on a case-by-case basis. Teams also need to look at trends in learning outcomes for subgroups of students. We have found it is rare for PLC team members to do this, but it is the most critical step. It may not be comfortable, but it is crucial.

One tool teams can use to visualize the data is the Progress vs. Achievement Tool, which can be found at [www.visiblelearningplus.com/groups/progress-vs-achievement-tool](http://www.visiblelearningplus.com/groups/progress-vs-achievement-tool). Inputting data into this tool creates a four-quadrant display of student outcome trends so that educators can tailor instruction to those groups' needs.

It displays student names in each quadrant and can include demographic information if the team includes it. The lower left quadrant includes students who did not make progress and did not achieve at the average of the group. The lower right quadrant includes students who made progress but still need to achieve more. The upper left quadrant includes students who achieved well but did not make a lot of progress. And the upper right quadrant includes students who both achieved well and made strong progress.

To ensure that the discussions focus on equity, teams need to consider the trends that they notice in each quadrant.

This is what happened when the middle school teachers mentioned previously entered their data into the data tool. The trends were obvious. The lower left quadrant was filled with



English learner students.

As one team member noted, “Without visualizing the data this way, I would have focused on the individual students in my class who needed more support. But it’s clear that we need to do something different for our English learners if we have any hopes that they will achieve. I think we need to reconsider our instructional supports and how we remove barriers for these students because we’re not doing enough to build their skills.”

### LOOKING THROUGH AN EQUITY LENS

These five questions can help PLCs confront the realities faced by students and become better teachers and advocates for their futures. To fulfill this potential, teams should always examine the impact their efforts

are having on student learning. This involves not only looking at student outcomes but also at changes in teaching.

For example, we encourage teachers to visit one another’s classrooms and examine the impact that specific instructional strategies and changes are having on students. During these visits and all interactions with PLC members, changing the questions to focus on equity can make a difference.

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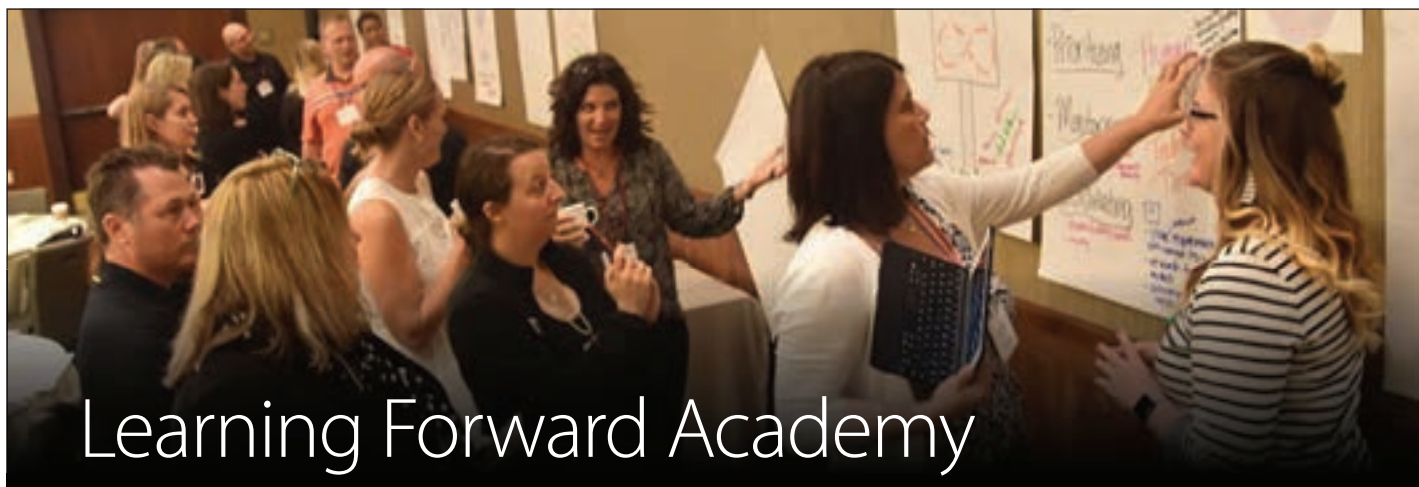
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Matt Smith, associate superintendent



Barry Jones, principal supervisor



Ruth Wright, project manager

## PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR INITIATIVE PUTS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AT THE FOREFRONT

BY SUZANNE BOUFFARD

**D**es Moines (Iowa) Public Schools is one of six urban districts participating in an effort to redesign the role of principal supervisors. The Wallace Foundation's Principal Supervisor Initiative provides four years of support for these districts to transform the role, which has traditionally focused on operations and compliance, into one that supports principals to be instructional leaders.

Des Moines' experience illustrates how the initiative is changing leadership structures and roles, as indicated in an implementation report of the initiative (Goldring et al., 2018). It also shows how professional learning at all leadership levels is essential for improvement.

### READ MORE

The article "Empowered students lead and learn" on p. 51 describes growth in student achievement in Des Moines Public Schools, according to a study of the Schools for Rigor work.

Des Moines associate superintendent Matt Smith, principal supervisor Barry Jones, and project manager Ruth Wright shared their experiences with *The Learning Professional*.

### Q: Why are you focusing on the role of principal supervisors?

**Matt Smith:** It started with

superintendent Thomas Ahart's vision to create an Office of School Structure to serve our leaders with development and support. Before this work began, our leaders had been focusing on alignment with the state standards, but we weren't grounding that in instructional leadership. We recognized the need to make a shift in roles and support to really emphasize instructional leadership.

We wanted to start with central office, because those of us in district leadership had been principals ourselves and had been the recipients of a lot of things that central office had pushed down to schools without real understanding or support. If we built the instructional focus among supervisors, they would be ready to

provide support, and we could roll it out to school leaders and then teachers.

After vetting several instructional models and frameworks, we decided to use the Marzano Instructional Framework. We also decided to work with Learning Sciences International, which uses aligned, hierarchical structures for tracking and aligning practices across levels, so that we could create consistency around the instructional framework. I remember being a principal, and when we did instructional rounds, our coaching was left up to what each of us thought it should be. The instructional framework is important for changing that and creating consistency.

**Q: What shifts are principal supervisors and principals making?**

**Barry Jones:** The instructional framework has been a game changer. Before, principals and principal supervisors had been acting as first responders, putting out fires all the time. Our umbrella of responsibilities was so big. When we started the Principal Supervisor Initiative, we focused really hard on working smarter and shifting from a mentality of management to one of instructional leadership.

**Smith:** This meant changing the role of principal supervisors to one focused on observing and coaching principals around the competencies of the framework. We had to make that

**“We told them that they couldn’t call the principal supervisor anymore about things like a pipe bursting, and we explained that would detract from the supervisor helping them with their instructional leadership practices.”**

— Matt Smith

role abundantly clear to principals. We told them that they couldn’t call the principal supervisor anymore about things like a pipe bursting, and we explained that would detract from the supervisor helping them with their instructional leadership practices. And we coached the supervisors about how to handle those kinds of requests and help shift principals’ mindsets.

**Q: How are principal supervisors focusing more on instruction?**

**Smith:** We created structures at central office to prepare and provide ongoing support to the principal supervisors so they can go deep into the instructional framework. About 30% of their time is spent engaging in professional learning about instructional leadership, in leadership PLCs, and in collaborative meetings with other principal supervisors and district teams. For example, they meet weekly or biweekly with the district’s teaching and learning curriculum teams

so that everyone is calibrated on the standards and competencies and in tune about what to look for in schools and classrooms. The rest of the principal supervisors’ time is spent in schools, observing and coaching principals. We follow best practice guidelines for the number of principals for every supervisor. We initially started with 10 to 1, and that ratio has fluctuated up and down slightly over time.

**Ruth Wright:** Another big shift is that we offer aligned professional learning for principals. We did not offer them instructional leadership professional learning before. We had management meetings, but not content development and learning. Now, principals and supervisors engage in a series of four 45-day professional learning cycles. Each starts with training on an aspect of the instructional framework, and then the supervisors do observation and coaching of the principals with follow-up every two weeks.

**Smith:** So when a principal and principal supervisor walk into a classroom, they can assess whether instruction and learning are happening at the right cognitive level, have deep conversations about whether the students are doing work that is aligned to the framework, and talk about pedagogical strategies like whether the teacher grouped kids well to achieve the task.

**Q: How does this translate to teachers and students?**

**Wright:** Everyone across the district is aligning their work with the

**ABOUT THE INITIATIVE**

The Principal Supervisor Initiative includes five core components:

1. Revise the principal supervisors’ job description to focus on instructional leadership;
2. Reduce principal supervisors’ span of control (the number of principals they oversee), and change how supervisors are assigned to principals ;
3. Train supervisors and develop their capacity to support principals;
4. Develop systems to identify and train new supervisors (succession planning); and
5. Strengthen central office structures to support and sustain changes in the principal supervisor’s role.

instructional framework. After central office and principals, we rolled this out to instructional coaches and teachers. With the foundation of the framework and use of a common language in place, we committed to going further and deepening the learning with Learning Sciences International's Schools for Rigor approach to school transformation to help us align practices across levels. (See the article on p. 51 for details about the teaching and learning approaches of Schools for Rigor.)

**Smith:** With the instructional framework, learning targets are a rallying point for curriculum. Teachers post them on their boards, so the principals and principal supervisors can assess what students are doing and whether it is aligned to the learning target. Everyone is on the same page.

To build their knowledge, teachers participate in PLCs in addition to the observation and feedback from principals and coaches. The work of the principal supervisors has been critical in getting school leaders to understand deeply what a highly effective PLC looks like. In addition to spending a lot of time in classrooms with principals, the supervisors spend many hours in principal PLCs, and they guide principals to see how they are modeling what effective teacher PLCs should look like.

### **Q: What changes are you seeing in leaders' and teachers' practices?**

**Jones:** When we started this work, the majority of all classroom instruction was teacher-centered, and students were practicing at retrieval-level tasks. The growth that's been made has been in tasks that are more rigorous. Now students are doing most of the thinking and talking, instead of teachers.

**Smith:** To assess the level of effectiveness of the principal supervisors, we are looking at student achievement data by network. There is a lot of context to each building's data. For example, in several of his schools, Barry is focused on closing the gap for

**“Principals tend to feel very isolated, but now with a principal supervisor who has been in the game and is responsible for the principals' success, they feel they can be vulnerable so they can learn and grow.”**

— Ruth Wright

African American males because that is a need in those buildings. But in another one of his buildings, the school is undergoing complete turnaround, so we are looking for accelerated growth for all students. We also do 360 evaluation, during which principals give detailed feedback about their supervisors.

**Wright:** They take this feedback seriously and are thoughtful about it, because they know it will impact how their supervisors support them in the future. But we see that most of the principals feel very positively about the supervisors and the process. Some of them say, “I hope my teachers feel about me the way I feel about my principal supervisor.” Principals tend to feel very isolated, but now with a principal supervisor who has been in the game and is responsible for the principals' success, they feel they can be vulnerable so they can learn and grow.

### **Q: What are your plans for the future? How will you make this work sustainable?**

**Smith:** The work of and support for principal supervisors has to be built into district infrastructure. Too often, when districts use grant funds to create new positions, they end up with a warm body but no capacity to change anything. And they often have to cut the positions when the grant funding ends.

Instead, from the beginning of the initiative, our superintendent has invested general funds in the principal supervisor positions and used grant support to build knowledge and

capacity through contracts with experts on instruction and leadership. That has allowed us to build knowledge that can be shared throughout the district. When we expanded this work from an initial pilot of six schools to 22 schools, principal supervisors led the implementation, with gradual release of responsibility from our partners at Learning Sciences International.

We are also aligning this work with a leadership pipeline. We are investing in our associate principals, and we know we need to go down a level to potential teacher leaders. The traditional pipeline work we used to do (identifying high-flying associate principals and meeting with them three hours a week for 12 weeks to discuss leadership principles) didn't quite capture the disposition and mindset we needed to create among principals. Now we are more focused on instructional leadership and what that really looks like.

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# EMPOWERED STUDENTS LEAD AND LEARN

ACADEMIC TEAMING BUILDS SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND COGNITIVE SUCCESS FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

BY MICHAEL D. TOTH

In a traditional teacher-centered classroom, the teacher works harder and harder to move students to greater learning gains, especially students on

the short end of achievement gaps and those with complex needs in mainstream classrooms. A pedagogical model called student-led academic teaming takes a different approach to

personalizing instruction and meeting the multifaceted needs of each student without increasing teacher fatigue and burnout. It allows teachers to work smarter, not harder.

With student-led academic teaming, students take increased ownership and accountability for their own and their peers' learning, relieving some of the pressure from the teacher and resulting in greater achievement gains. Working in teams, students are empowered to reach higher levels of critical thinking because they can rely on their peers for support and can challenge each other to move further.

Student-led academic teaming is a major component of Schools for Rigor, a school transformation approach created by Learning Sciences International that also includes assessment of school systems through scientific protocols, professional learning and coaching for teachers and school leaders, and constant tracking of student evidence to drive improvement in teaching and learning.

Schools for Rigor engages all leaders and staff in a common vision and language for rigorous instruction through academic teaming, which brings student ownership to the forefront of teaching and learning through shifts in lesson planning, classroom routines, instructional strategies, and expectations for teachers and students.

We recently conducted a study of Schools for Rigor in Des Moines, Iowa, one of our largest partner districts. Over the course of one school year, 22 schools that implemented the model built their capacity to facilitate 45-day cycles of professional learning for leaders and teachers. Students in these schools outperformed students in the district's control schools. (See the article on p. 48 for a detailed look at how professional learning for principals and principal supervisors transformed district leaders' focus on instruction.)

Notably, English learner students benefited significantly from the Schools for Rigor approach. We saw their engagement skyrocket and the achievement gap between English learners and non-English learner students narrow as they found the opportunity to share their thinking,

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- The full research report on Schools for Rigor in Des Moines Public Schools is available at [www.learningsciences.com/rigor](http://www.learningsciences.com/rigor). See the appendix for more information on the study's methodology and calculations.
- Visit [academicteaming.com](http://academicteaming.com) for a comprehensive source of academic teaming expertise, including free resources, videos of academic teaming in action, author commentary, and case studies.
- More in-depth educator stories and experiences from Des Moines, along with a research-based framework and rationale, are included in *The Power of Student Teams: Achieving Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Learning in Every Classroom Through Academic Teaming* (Toth & Sousa, 2019). The book is available at [www.learningsciences.com/books/the-power-of-student-teams](http://www.learningsciences.com/books/the-power-of-student-teams).

respectfully challenge their peers' thinking, and elevate their learning in teams. This is an important achievement in a district where one in five students is an English learner.

## STUDENT-LED ACADEMIC TEAMING

Student-led academic teaming is a daily instructional model in which the teacher's role shifts from spending most of the classroom time on delivering direct instruction and monitoring independent work to designing rigorous tasks and providing minilessons on foundational content and skills that students then further develop through collaborative work.

It involves students organized into small, diverse teams with clear protocols for engaging in standards-based academic team tasks (Toth & Sousa, 2019). Unlike a student *group*, which is teacher-directed, an *academic team* is student-led, ultimately functioning with little direct guidance from the teacher. Students work with their peers for most of the lesson.

Teachers create rich learning tasks and put academic teaming systems into place. Academic teams gradually take on some of the responsibilities traditionally held by the teacher, such as supporting struggling peers, ensuring learning is accessible and equitable among all team members, and

supporting struggling peers.

As teachers gradually transition from traditional instruction to student-led academic teaming, students form social bonds, internalize team norms, and learn to regulate their own learning and behavior. For example, when a teacher first puts her students into teams, she may provide team talk protocols where students converse with each other using sentence stems such as "I disagree with you because ..." and "Why do you think that?"

This process may feel awkward at first, especially for students who did not verbally participate in their learning previously, but, over time, students begin to feel more comfortable communicating with each other and engage in lively debates with no need to reference their sentence stems.

As student teams become more advanced, teachers spend less time monitoring student behavior and more time tracking student learning and providing additional support to those students not making progress to the lesson learning target, preventing achievement gaps before they happen.

## EMPOWERING ENGLISH LEARNERS

The student-led academic teaming model can be particularly valuable for English learners because engaging in authentic collaboration with peers

allows them to experience high-quality rigorous instruction even in large general education classrooms. There are several potential benefits for English learners.

**Enables productive struggle.**

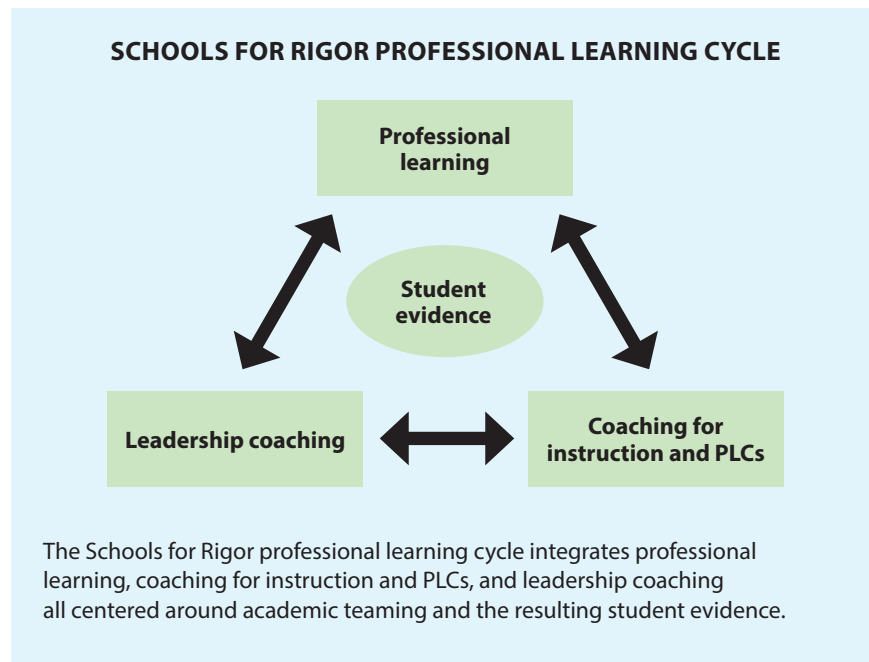
It is often difficult for teachers to watch their students struggle. This can be especially hard in the case of English learners because many teachers empathize with the fact that these students face particularly daunting challenges as they learn a new language. Teachers may want to step in to protect English learners from further hardship, but it is important that English learners, like all students, develop independence.

Productive struggle, defined as students working with knowledge and skills slightly above their current level of competency, occurs when students are thinking their way through a difficult solution or grappling with complex issues while the teacher steps back. Academic teams can support English learner (and other) students to engage in productive struggle. In their teams, they can rely on their peers for support and challenge each other to higher levels of critical thinking.

For example, a kindergarten teacher in Des Moines Public Schools gave an example of how her students, some of them English learners, are capable of more rigorous tasks while working together in a team. When students did independent activities in the past, the teacher assigned low-rigor work like copying down a sight word individually at their desks.

Now, because she knows they can rely on and learn from one another, she challenges teams to higher-rigor tasks like creating an entire sentence using the sight word correctly. She sets high expectations for all her students and reports that the children amaze her with what they are capable of (Toth & Sousa, 2019).

**Increases opportunities to practice academic language.** For English learners, the opportunity to consistently practice academic conversations in a low-stakes environment is crucial for developing confidence in speaking and



**Productive struggle, defined as students working with knowledge and skills slightly above their current level of competency, occurs when students are thinking their way through a difficult solution or grappling with complex issues while the teacher steps back.**

listening.

In academic teams, English learners become immersed in academic language, and they have enough autonomy for academic conversations to flow organically and authentically. Furthermore, academic teaming is structured so that every student is accountable for participating in the team’s tasks. This ensures that all students are able to contribute to conversations and debates around the academic content.

Students say they feel more comfortable speaking with a small group of peers rather than raising their hands to speak in front of the

whole class. Students also say that they understand academic content better when a peer explains in their own words and that it is easier to remember the content after discussing it in their teams (Toth & Sousa, 2019).

**Creates a supportive classroom culture.** Student-led academic teaming creates a classroom culture where students learn to embrace their differences and use their diverse backgrounds and perspectives as strengths. Social and emotional bonds like trust, vulnerability, shared vision and values, and empowerment develop within the collaborative structure of the team.

As a result, English learner students are able to experience peer acceptance and belonging and, eventually, self-actualization. English learners are able to see that their unique perspectives and personal assets are valued and that they can be contributing members of their teams. Student voice and choice increases in academic teams, further boosting engagement and ownership (Toth & Sousa, 2019).

Academic teaming also supports all students’ social and emotional development. Just as students must engage in productive struggle to grow

# IDEAS

academically, they must also engage in productive struggle to grow socially and emotionally. This means teachers must create structures to let students resolve their own conflicts, coach each other through challenges, peer-teach, and ultimately ensure that everyone on the team reaches the learning target. Academic teams are well-suited to these strategies.

## PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SUPPORTS

Schools for Rigor includes professional learning for school leaders and classroom staff, intensive coaching for leaders and teachers, and supporting technology to measure progress — all for the purpose of shifting the whole school to academic teaming.

Teachers and school leaders participate in a series of 45-day professional learning cycles. First, teachers and school leaders (as well as principal supervisors and other district staff, as noted in the article on p. 48) engage in professional learning days where they learn academic teaming techniques and create a shared vision and plan for shifting their instruction to teaming.

But professional learning days alone are not enough to create the capacity for whole-school reform. Schools for Rigor also includes expert, nonevaluative coaching for teachers and instructional coaches and professional learning community (PLC) leaders. They receive immediate feedback through live classroom coaching so they can make adjustments to their use of the academic teaming techniques for maximum effectiveness.

Outside the classroom, two levels of coaching create a system of demand and support to allow for the greatest impact in the classroom. Leadership coaching helps the principal, principal supervisors, and school leadership team learn to make demands and hold their staff accountable to high standards. Expert coaching for the school instructional coaches and PLC leaders helps teachers with systems of support

through the shift to academic teaming.

Coaching at both teacher and school principal levels allows for alignment and integrated supports while focusing the whole school on putting strong systems into place for sustainability. Teachers, coaches, PLC leaders, and school leaders are all focused around a learner-centered vision for instruction.

With the professional learning, coaching for instruction and PLCs, and leadership coaching all connected in one cycle of professional learning, the focus is always on positively changing outcomes for students by implementing academic teaming with fidelity and examining student evidence. (See figure on p. 53.)

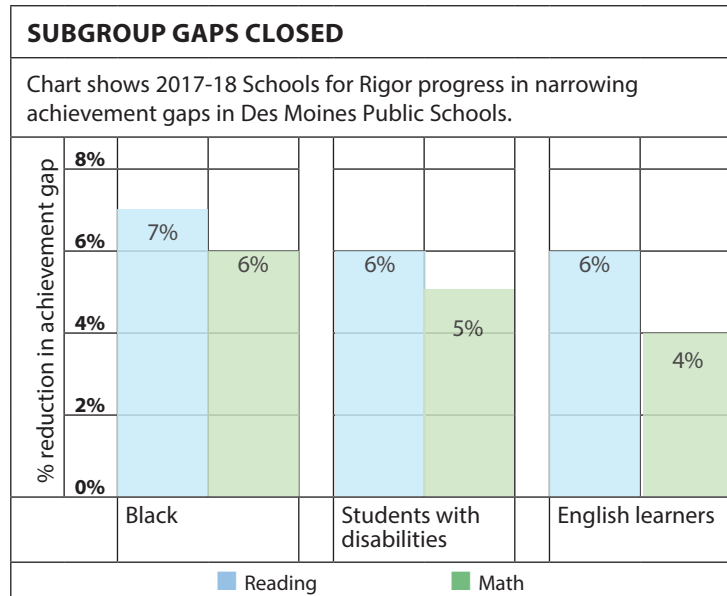
## SUCCESS IN A LARGE URBAN DISTRICT

The Learning Sciences International Applied Research Center conducted a research study on Schools for Rigor, which builds capacity for student-led

academic teaming through professional learning, assessment, and tracking for leaders and staff in the Des Moines Public Schools district.

Des Moines is a large urban school district where more than one in five students is an English learner, and students speak over 100 different languages. In the 2017-18 school year, 22 of the 64 schools implemented Schools for Rigor and shifted to student-led academic teaming with professional learning supports. Those 22 schools included 10,431 students. In these schools, Learning Sciences International initially facilitated the professional learning cycle but then transferred this responsibility to the district, a transition that is critical for true sustainability.

Students at all Schools for Rigor — including those schools whose professional learning cycle was facilitated by Learning Sciences International and those schools whose cycle was facilitated by the district



**Teachers must create structures to let students resolve their own conflicts, coach each other through challenges, peer-teach, and ultimately ensure that everyone on the team reaches the learning target.**



in their second year — experienced a statistically significant impact. Schools for Rigor students showed a 7% improvement in reading and 3% improvement in mathematics over the gain that would otherwise be expected within 162 school days.

This improvement translates into the equivalent of receiving an additional 11 days of learning in reading and an additional six days in mathematics for Schools for Rigor students. In other words, all students in the district would require an additional 11 days of reading instruction and an additional six days of mathematics instruction to make the same learning gains Schools for Rigor students did with academic teaming.

According to the district's 2017-18 math and reading assessment scores, English learners in schools where teaming was implemented outperformed English learners in schools where teaming was not

implemented. Schools for Rigor English learners reduced the achievement gap with non-English learners by 6% in reading and 4% in mathematics within 162 school days.

Results for other subgroups were also promising. Black students in Schools for Rigor reduced the achievement gap with white students by 7% in reading and 6% percent in mathematics. Schools for Rigor students with disabilities reduced the achievement gap with students without disabilities by 6% in reading and 5% in mathematics. See the figure on p. 54.

### EQUITY FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

Student-led academic teaming has the power and potential to result in more equitable outcomes for English learners and to better support English learners in general education classrooms as compared to traditional instruction.

Academic teaming provides English

learners and all students with access to rigorous instruction, increased opportunities to practice speaking and listening, and a more supportive classroom culture.

Academic teaming also helps teachers and school leaders focus themselves around a common instructional vision and drive a sustainable professional learning cycle.

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# CULTIVATE, CREATE, AND CONNECT

VIRTUAL NETWORK BUILDS  
COMMUNITY AND SPARKS  
CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

BY DARLA EDWARDS

**W**hen I was a principal, it was difficult to gather my staff for professional learning after school. They wanted to learn the material but seldom had time to participate in these learning opportunities because of time, classroom responsibilities, family commitments, or child care issues. As

a result, many teachers didn't have the benefit of sharing best practices with colleagues or learning innovative teaching techniques, so I couldn't justify further investment in the professional learning.

I soon learned that other principals were having similar challenges with their teachers. We all faced the same question: Is it possible to help teachers

overcome these challenges while still providing them access to meaningful collaboration opportunities and professional learning?

Since my time as a principal, I have learned that the answer is yes. But it doesn't happen through after-school workshops. It happens through ongoing networks of support and learning.

An innovative solution is a

networked improvement community (Bryk, Gomez, & Grunow, 2010). Networked improvement communities bring together educators from across schools and districts so they can overcome physical and financial obstacles to professional learning, share resources, and centralize information sharing.

A networked improvement community can be a tremendous resource for people who share a common interest and desire to learn from each other, and, thanks to technology, this can occur even when participants are separated by a large distance.

This has been the case with the Rural Math Innovation Network, a four-year project funded by a U.S. Department of Education Investing in Innovation (i3) grant. The Rural Math Innovation Network is a virtual networked improvement community of middle and high school math teachers.

Participants collaborate to share and learn best practices for helping students develop growth mindsets and self-efficacy in mathematics, specifically pre-algebra and algebra 1. Experience with participating teachers and leaders as well as an evaluation study have supported the hypothesis that connections across geographic boundaries are valuable for teachers and, ultimately, for students.

## CHALLENGES IN RURAL SCHOOLS

Virginia Advanced Study Strategies developed the Rural Math Innovation Network as a virtual

network to address major challenges to professional learning in rural districts, where teachers are often isolated both professionally and geographically (Beesley & Clark, 2015).

Few rural teachers have the opportunity to connect with role-alike colleagues, as they are often the only teacher of a specific course or content area within their school and possibly even their district. Furthermore, rural districts often have limited fiscal and human resources (Dessoff, 2010).

The virtual network gives teachers the flexibility to connect with each other at anytime from anywhere. It allows them to build strong social connections and trusting relationships, even across a physical distance, that help the members appreciate and respect the knowledge and expertise that each member brings to the collective effort. This in turn can spark new ideas for continuous improvement.

## BUILDING THE NETWORK

Virginia Advanced Study Strategies established memos of understanding with 18 school divisions in southwest and southside Virginia, which enabled math teachers within these divisions to submit applications to participate in the network.

At the end of the first year in December 2017, the project had a 34-member teacher cohort across 25 schools. By the end of the second year, most of the schools and teachers continued to participate, and the cohort included 30 teachers (19 middle school teachers and 11 high school teachers)

across 20 schools within 16 rural districts.

The network began with an in-person summer institute in 2017, where teachers engaged in technology topics important to their role in the networked community, such as using tablets, recording and loading videos, viewing and critiquing videos, and navigating the project's online network. This in-person convening provided a strong foundation for the virtual connections that would happen throughout the year.

Teachers unable to attend the summer institute could connect through webinars, review videos of key sessions from the summer institute, and communicate with network facilitators.

## FEEDBACK AND REFLECTION

Following the summer institute, participants developed and shared anchor lesson plans to guide math instruction. Each teacher created a lesson plan that includes instructional strategies that increase students' beliefs that they can learn and master math through practice and that make math relevant through real-world applications. Relevance helps students see the value of learning math to their everyday life.

Teachers shared the lesson plans with the others for feedback and revision. Using a template designed by the project consultants, teachers created and uploaded their lesson plans to an online platform that is shared with other teachers in the network.

Teachers then video recorded

TEACHER SURVEY PRACTICE/BEHAVIOR SUBSCALE AVERAGE SCORES AND DIFFERENCES FOR YEARS 1-2							
Practice/behavior subscales	N	Year 1		Year 2		Difference (Y2-Y1)	Stat. Sig.
		Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.		
Observation	22	2.45	1.35	3.97	0.57	1.52 (standard 1.13)	*
Lesson plans	24	4.25	0.63	4.64	0.60	0.39 (standard 0.62)	*
Growth mindset	24	5.39	0.53	5.56	0.46	0.17 (standard 0.34)	*

Std. Dev. = standard deviation    Stat. Sig. = statistical significance    Standard = standardized effect size

TEACHER SURVEY BELIEF SUBSCALE AVERAGE SCORES AND DIFFERENCES FOR YEARS 1-2							
Belief subscales	N	Year 1		Year 2		Difference (Y2-Y1)	Stat. Sig.
		Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.		
Collaboration	21	3.83	0.53	4.50	0.38	0.67 (standard 1.26)	*
Observation	23	3.78	0.64	4.41	0.46	0.62 (standard 0.97)	*
Technology	24	4.13	0.57	4.40	0.53	0.28 (standard 0.49)	*
Applied math	24	3.95	0.44	4.20	0.45	0.25 (standard 0.57)	*
Growth mindset	24	4.20	0.42	4.45	0.39	0.24 (standard 0.57)	*
Innovation	24	4.01	0.42	4.22	0.45	0.21 (standard 0.50)	*
Self-efficacy	23	4.05	0.43	4.26	0.43	0.21 (standard 0.49)	*

Std. Dev. = standard deviation    Stat. Sig. = statistical significance    Standard = standardized effect size

their lesson delivery in the classroom using project tablets and uploaded the videos to the platform. In small peer groups, teachers served as critical friends to critique each other’s lessons and instruction, using a feature in the online platform that allows the viewer to tag and comment on specific points in the video. Teachers then used an iterative cycle to revise and strengthen their lesson plans and instruction.

Through this process, teachers are able to self-reflect on their own practices and also provide constructive feedback to their colleagues.

We scaffold and support these interactions with other virtual support. We have led several webinars that provided follow-up support in specific areas, such as classroom communication strategies to increase student self-efficacy and growth mindset, lesson plan template tips, and use of the virtual platform. Other virtual network

activities have included professional discussion through teacher forums that focused on specific subtopics of interest.

### TRUST AND COLLABORATION ENABLE SUCCESS

One of the main reasons that the Rural Math Innovation Network has been successful is because the colleagues have formed meaningful relationships and strong bonds. When you trust and respect your colleagues, you are more likely to listen and take their advice because you feel that they genuinely want you to improve.

On the other hand, when you do not trust your colleagues, constructive feedback can feel like a personal attack, and it stagnates growth. Any collaborative network must first invest time in building and cultivating trust among the team so that the network will flourish and thrive.

Another component for the

success of effective networks is collaboration. Each member will bring his or her own ideas, expertise, and knowledge, and it is important that every member is respected as a valued expert. The teachers in our network enjoy collaborating because everyone contributes and feels like a valuable member of the team. Novice teachers gain new ideas in math instruction from veteran teachers, while veteran teachers gain innovative techniques from their novice colleagues.

Trust and collaboration are particularly important in this project because many teachers initially felt nervous about videotaping their own instruction for others to critique. Some felt nervous in front of the camera anyway, but this fear was compounded by the thought of someone actually watching and commenting on this footage.

Once teachers became comfortable

STUDENT SURVEY SUBSCALE SCORES FOR TREATMENT AND COMPARISON GROUPS FOR YEAR 2													
5													
4	4.77	4.48								4.91	4.48		
3			4.2	3.98	4.14	3.94							
2							2.79	3.09					
1													
	Growth mindset		Self-efficacy		Math self-efficacy		Math anxiety		Teacher's use of growth mindset and self-efficacy instructional practices				
All comparisons are statistically significant. <span style="color: blue;">■</span> Treatment <span style="color: green;">■</span> Comparison													

with using the tablet to videotape themselves, they soon appreciated the helpful feedback they received from their colleagues because it had a positive impact on their instruction. Teachers now look forward to videotaping their lessons and sharing ideas with their colleagues.

### MAKING TIME FOR COMMUNICATION

Communication forms the foundation for trust and collaboration. It is helpful to schedule a specific time each week during the month to collaborate. This ensures that the meetings will always take place and that the time will be maximized (Wenger, 1999). Rural Math Innovation Network teachers schedule specific time for regular stand-up meetings, where they connect virtually to discuss ideas, share feedback, and provide advice related to both instruction and project requirements.

Supportive leadership is also essential. When leaders support teachers, teachers are more invested in the network and participate at higher rates. We took time to explain the network to the principals so that they felt comfortable with teachers participating.

Realizing the importance of supportive leadership, Virginia Advanced Study Strategies invited principals to the 2017 summer

institute. We hosted a special session for principals guided by the National Principal of the Year. This session addressed supporting teacher innovation and highlighted techniques under principal leadership in practice.

Consultants provided expertise and support to teachers in the network and their principals. Additionally, principals participated in follow-up webinars to continue discussing ways to foster instructional innovation by participating teachers.

### EVALUATING IMPACT

Through the i3 grant program, we have the funding and a mandate to conduct an independent evaluation of the project. In January 2019, an evaluation report covered the first two years of the project and the first two phases of the evaluation: a formative study of participants' reactions, beliefs, and behaviors and an implementation study of the program components.

Data sources included feedback surveys of principals and teachers, an annual online survey of teachers' beliefs and practices, teacher focus groups, and a survey completed by students of participating teachers as well as a control group of students.

In year 2, the program was implemented with high fidelity. High percentages of participants met the threshold for adequate fidelity for all three major components of the project

(86% for principal training/support, 97% for teacher training/support, and 87% for teacher cohort development).

Feedback from teachers and principals has been positive, with all survey items about the program's relevance and participants' satisfaction being above 4 on a 5-point scale (4.18 for principals and 4.38 for teachers).

Principals and teachers reported increases in relevant knowledge and beliefs. For example, principals reported that their understanding of how to support teacher innovation increased by 1.63 points on a 5-point scale. The table on p. 58 shows increases in teachers' beliefs about the importance of fostering growth mindset, self-efficacy, and real-world applications of math as well as their beliefs about their knowledge of how to engage in collaboration, peer observation, technology, and innovative practices through the project.

Teachers also reported significant growth in several skills, especially in providing peer-to-peer feedback through observations, collaboratively developing lesson plans, and fostering growth mindset, as shown in the table on p. 58.

When asked about their beliefs related to growth mindset, self-efficacy, and other areas targeted by the project, students of participating teachers were more positive than those of control group teachers. For example, they were

# IDEAS

more likely to believe they could master difficult math content and less likely to be anxious about math. (See table on p. XX.) These students also reported their teachers used strategies that promote these messages and beliefs more often.

These positive and encouraging results will provide valuable context for a planned impact study.

## THE POWER OF VIRTUAL NETWORKS

Teachers who participate in the Rural Math Innovation Network have formed close connections with their virtual colleagues throughout the state. Their colleagues provide them with useful and helpful feedback on the implementation of these strategies and challenge them with new ideas and suggestions to improve their

instruction.

Reflecting on the two years of this project, I wish that I had known about the power of virtual networks when I was a principal. It would have solved the barriers of time, location, expense, and frustrations associated with traditional professional learning at the school.

This innovative approach to professional learning has cultivated new ideas, inspired creative teaching techniques, and strengthened the connections between educators.

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# 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, Eric Brooks, chief academic officer of Yuma Union High School District in Yuma, Arizona, and senior consultant at Learning Forward, revisits an article by Andrew Szczepaniak in the February 2010 issue of *JSD* on technology.**

**"S**o many articles in *The Learning Professional* have impacted my work over the years. As chief academic officer of a high school district, I am constantly striving to find ways to embed professional learning into teachers' daily work. In this article from February 2010, author Andrew Szczepaniak, who, like me, hails from Arizona, created a big 'aha!' moment for me by discussing how to link professional learning to teacher practice and student learning.



Eric Brooks

"I often tell teachers to think of themselves as scientists with lab coats and our schools as their labs. Those meaningful things they see — we need to find ways to replicate those pockets of success so that all students and teachers can have access to that type of achievement. We need to create space where educators can openly reflect on what they are doing and make immediate small changes to maximize student impact.

"In his article, Szczepaniak talks about using technology to do this. It frees educators from being locked into a scheduled meeting time. He paints a picture of continuous conversation taking place, which is exciting when you think of communication as being the basis of the continuous improvement cycle."

— **Zeroing in on data** p. **62**

## ZEROING IN ON DATA

CUSTOMIZED ANALYSIS PINPOINTS EVIDENCE OF STUDENT IMPACT



BY ANDREW SZCZEPANIAK

In the predawn hours, Tami Chowdhury taps on her keyboard, pausing to sip her coffee, and thinks about whether the previous day’s learning strategies helped her junior high students achieve identified behavioral goals. Chowdhury is taking part in the “Mind in the Making” course, provided jointly by the Gilbert Public School District (near Phoenix, Arizona) and Rio Salado College.

Whether it’s early in the morning, after the kids are in bed, or somewhere in between, over several months, Chowdhury and her peers find time to collaboratively reflect on what they are learning in the course, share how they are applying new knowledge in practice, and look for evidence of student impact.

With the right technology, learners have found that ongoing application of knowledge along with reflection and generation around practice are easily facilitated. Application-related

discussions can occur at any time, and over extended periods of time, as educators work like researchers to put theory into practice and test their hypotheses.

Administrators like me can move beyond assumptions, guesswork, and hope to gather, organize, and analyze outcome data in ways that are now possible using a finely tuned professional development management and evaluation system. We are just starting out, but the early results are exciting: Chowdhury and the other participants in the application project observed positive changes in student engagement and behavior since they began applying new learning about brain research.

How do you gather data to demonstrate impact? With the help of the team at My Learning Plan Inc., our professional development management and evaluation system, we sought to

learn how technology could assist us. At Gilbert, our mission is “Helping to move your professional practice forward,” and we have been working to uphold that by offering a variety of courses aligned to our district goals.

More recently, we have been thinking deeply about NSDC’s purpose and are committed to connecting high-quality professional learning to improved student learning. We had an idea but no hard evidence to know if our district’s professional learning impacted our students in a meaningful way. We wanted to start with small, concrete steps.

### GETTING STARTED: CREATING FORMS

I contacted Robin Ocheltree, the instructor of the “Mind in the Making” brain-based research course offered through our electronic catalog. Ocheltree had expressed openness about being



involved in a new process, and, like me, she was eager to see more tangibly and specifically how the learning that she would facilitate would make its way into participants' classrooms.

First, we talked through the data-gathering process, then we developed a form that would enable teachers to document their application intentions and note the indicators of changes in practice and impact on student outcomes that they would use. We also created an online log form for participants to use to regularly journal about what they were applying as well as the expected and achieved outcomes.

It was important to link the log form to what we call our TeamRoom to create a hub for sustained collegial conversation through threaded discussions and file sharing, based on course content. Participants were able to collaborate and discuss their findings and submit log forms from one simple interface. Finally, we set up a reflection form to provide a structured method for educators to record what they applied and the effects on their students using previously entered indicators and baseline data.

None of this could be done without careful planning and development of a support process that would enable all to maximize the online learning environment. I strategically select and plan with each instructor for the courses involved in the application projects. I meet with each instructor individually while the courses are being developed before we enter information in our online system. During this meeting, I provide detailed rationale about assessing impact, and I describe

how our district is looking for changes in educator practice and evidence of impact on student achievement.

Once the instructor has a deep understanding of the process, we customize and review the forms together. Then I develop a self-guided tour of the process for the participants and present the new opportunities around assessing impact with each cohort of learners. We demonstrate the entire approach step-by-step to show participants how easy it is and to highlight why and how professional learning is becoming a change agent for our district. I also make sure that I am available at any time for questions in order to demonstrate a cycle of continual support.

In addition, I have embedded this process into the courses that I teach. To build leadership capacity, instructors will begin to introduce the process on their own.

#### **FACILITATING LEARNING: MONITORING APPLICATION**

With the infrastructure in place, participating teachers met with Ocheltree weekly over a four-month period and collaborated online to engage in sustained learning, supporting the notion that “in reality, staff development is ongoing learning” (Killion, 2008, p. 25). An overall educator goal was to apply brain research to create a safe, orderly, and supportive learning environment.

Chowdhury's personal goal, as stated on her application form, was to see improved student self-regulation. She planned to achieve this goal by modifying her practice to improve her

#### **USEFUL GUIDING QUESTIONS**

- Are educators constructing new content and operational knowledge from professional learning?
- How do you know?
- Do they apply new learning in classroom practice?
- How can you support transfer?
- Are changes in teaching impacting student learning?
- How can that be demonstrated?
- Is increased student learning translating into improved performance?
- Do your assessments reflect the student learning and achievement results you're seeking?

reactions to certain student behaviors. Throughout the course, Chowdhury and her partners used the online TeamRoom to discuss what they were learning and applying in their classrooms. They shared examples of practice and student performance in relation to their new strategies.

Chowdhury discussed her experience with one particular target student, including a description of his baseline behavior and how it changed over time. The technology also empowered team members to process their experiences in online log forms, noting what they applied, the anticipated results, and real outcomes.

While the group learned, applied, and looked for evidence of student improvements, Ocheltree and I used MyLearningPlan to organize and track

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# CLASSICS

the records of application successes and challenges that were unfolding. We had set up multiple measures to draw from, yet the electronic report-writer enabled us to amass all of the data in a single, simple interface for efficient analysis.

On an ongoing basis, we scanned compilations of the TeamRoom discussions and reviewed the logs to note evidence of knowledge application, and we were also able to make midcourse adjustments based on timely information.

Laying the foundation for this course and future courses was critical for a successful implementation, and an important goal for our department. I needed to begin building a transparent structure that would indicate to instructors and participants that, by being involved in this kind of project, they would not only shape their own practice, but also inform what we offer and how we structure professional learning in the district down the road. My underlying focus was on how to scale the process to include application and impact elements in more courses over time, and to go deeper by adding meaningful layers to the process.

One of these additional components is classroom walk-throughs to identify and document the evidence in action.

Chowdhury reflected on the process: “The TeamRoom and application project helped me narrow down the most important theories and provided me the tools to apply these theories directly in my classroom. From the ‘Mind in the Making’ course, I learned that bonding with students is very important to keep them engaged and interested in our teaching and in their own learning.”

## **GATHERING DATA:** ANALYZING RESULTS

At the end of the year, participating educators used our online system to contemplate and document what transpired. Via online reflection forms, all respondents indicated that they changed their practice in at least one

way and that they noted one or more positive changes in student behavior. Sources of evidence included log entries about student performance and summaries of student interviews.

In addition, teachers examined attendance records, grades on classroom assessments, and student work to look for substantiated improvements in appropriate student engagement. Based on one measure, 50% of respondents stated that grades had improved and that students had enhanced their problem-solving skills. Ocheltree and I used the system to collect data and share it among the group, using customized reports to create summaries of both the expressed expectations and tangible results.

Ocheltree said, “With this data, I have been able to adjust my face-to-face teaching, as I was able to read what the teachers posted as well as the concerns they were having with the course materials. Even though they are teachers, they process the information much like their own students. After they leave each class, they have many unanswered questions, which they discussed in the TeamRoom, and that helped them bring their learning alive in their classrooms. The application project has been really beneficial.”

## **MOVING FORWARD:** REFINING AND SCALING

When we first began thinking about linking professional development to teacher practice and student learning, it seemed like a big leap. With the help of our professional development management and evaluation system, we are taking initial steps to gauge the effectiveness of professional learning based on student indicators, rather than only teacher perceptions of satisfaction with professional learning activities.

We’re laying out tremendous expenditures of time and finances, and now we are compiling data to help us determine if the efforts are reaching our students. Without technology, we would never be able to assemble, sort, organize, and report essential

information within a useful time frame.

While Chowdhury and her team were intrigued with their initial outcomes, they agree that there is more to learn and do to realize greater long-term student effects, and we realize that understanding how to proficiently gather and interpret evaluation data is as much an evolving process as learning itself.

Looking ahead, we are using our preliminary findings to inform our district’s adult learning priorities and to enhance our professional learning designs.

We have streamlined our forms, and we are expanding our use of these tools to larger groups of teachers and to a handful of additional courses this year to continue to monitor progress and gather information. We are also working with other facilitators to articulate anticipated teacher and student outcomes in more specific and measurable terms.

My biggest learning was the value of starting small. We began by systematically assessing knowledge-level learning, then we gradually moved to looking at application and impact data.

The technology allowed us to not only effectively manage all of the in-district and out-of-district professional learning, but also to begin to learn about where and how we should focus our limited resources. Across the board, from budgeting to identifying meaningful learning opportunities to scheduling, our decision making is becoming more well-informed, and we are confident that the technology will only continue to support and enhance these efforts.

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Discuss. Collaborate. Facilitate.

# TOOLS

**CONTENT-  
FOCUSED  
FEEDBACK  
BENEFITS  
TEACHERS  
AND  
LEADERS**

## **ACHIEVE THE CORE'S**

Instructional Practice Guide is a tool designed to support content-focused reflection and professional learning. Useful for cross-role discussions, teachers, coaches, and school leaders can use the core actions and indicators within the tool to foster a shared understanding of what college- and career-ready instruction looks like. The tool provides high-leverage actions teachers can take in the classroom to ensure that all students are receiving challenging, grade-level instruction, and provides a framework to help school leaders make decisions around materials, support, and professional learning.

In the following pages, we include an excerpt of the Instructional Practice Guide for English language arts in grades 3-12. The full guide and other subject areas are available at [achievethecore.org/instructional-practice-guide](http://achievethecore.org/instructional-practice-guide).

# TOOLS

## INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE GUIDE

### ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS / LITERACY 3-12

The guide supports content-focused planning, reflection, and professional learning. This excerpt from the guide focuses on English language arts/literacy in grades 3-12. It focuses on the following components of this content area by detailing how they appear in instruction:

**Complexity:** Practice regularly with complex text and its academic language.

**Evidence:** Ground reading, writing, and speaking in evidence from text, both literary and informational.

**Knowledge:** Build knowledge through content-rich nonfiction.

For each observation, you should make note of what you see and hear. It may be helpful to supplement what you've recorded with further evidence from artifacts such as lesson plans, tasks, or student work. Although many indicators will be observable during the course of a lesson, there may be times when a lesson is appropriately focused on a smaller set of objectives or you observe only a portion of a lesson. In those cases, leave some of the tool blank. Whenever possible, share evidence you collected during the observation in a follow-up discussion.

Find the complete Instructional Practice Guide for math, English language arts, science, and history/social studies, along with free companion tools and resources at [achievethecore.org/instructional-practice](http://achievethecore.org/instructional-practice).

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Observer name: \_\_\_\_\_

#### CORE ACTION 1 Focus each lesson on a high-quality text or multiple texts.

INDICATORS: Note evidence observed or gathered for each indicator.

RATING

**A.** A majority of the lesson is spent reading, writing, or speaking about text(s).  
Name of text: \_\_\_\_\_  
Type of text(s) (circle): Informational / Literary / Other media or format

**Yes:** The lesson is focused on a text or multiple texts.  
**No:** There is no text under consideration in this lesson.

**B.** The anchor text(s) are at or above the complexity level expected for the grade and time in the school year. (Anchor texts are texts used as the centerpiece of instructional time, distinct from varied texts students might read on their own for a variety of purposes. Refer to [achievethecore.org/ela-literacy-common-core/text-complexity](http://achievethecore.org/ela-literacy-common-core/text-complexity) for text complexity resources.)  
Quantitative measure(s) used: \_\_\_\_\_  
Quantitative score(s): \_\_\_\_\_  
Approximate grade band: \_\_\_\_\_  
To approximate the grade band for the text, consider the quantitative measure or score, the qualitative features, and the related task.

**Yes:** The anchor text(s) are at or above both the qualitative and quantitative complexity expected for the grade and time in the school year.  
**No:** The anchor text(s) are below the qualitative or quantitative complexity expected for the grade and time in the school year.  
**N/A:** Anchor text not observed.

**C.** The text(s) exhibit exceptional craft and thought and provide meaningful information in the service of building knowledge.

**Yes:** The text(s) exhibit exceptional craft and thought or provide meaningful information in the service of building knowledge.  
**No:** The text(s) do not exhibit exceptional craft and thought or provide meaningful information in the service of building knowledge.

INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE GUIDE

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Observer name: \_\_\_\_\_

**CORE ACTION 2** Employ questions and tasks, both oral and written, that are text-specific and accurately address the analytical thinking required by the grade-level standards.

INDICATORS: Note evidence observed or gathered for each indicator. These actions may be viewed over the course of two to three class periods.

**RATING**

**A.** Questions and tasks address the text by attending to its particular qualitative features: its meaning/purpose or language, structure(s), or knowledge demands.

NOT OBSERVED

- 4: Most questions and tasks attend to the qualitative features of the text to build understanding.
- 3: Many questions and tasks attend to the qualitative features of the text to build understanding.
- 2: Few questions and tasks attend to the qualitative features of the text to build understanding.
- 1: Questions and tasks do not attend to the qualitative features of the text to build understanding.
- N/A: There is no text present in the lesson.

**B.** Questions and tasks require students to use evidence from the text to demonstrate understanding and support their ideas about the text. These ideas are expressed through written and oral responses.

NOT OBSERVED

- 4: Most questions and tasks require students to cite evidence from the text.
- 3: Many questions and tasks require students to cite evidence from the text.
- 2: Few questions and tasks require students to cite evidence from the text.
- 1: Questions and tasks can be answered without evidence from the text.
- N/A: There is no text present in the lesson.

**C.** Questions and tasks attend to the words (academic vocabulary), phrases, and sentences within the text.

NOT OBSERVED

- 4: Vocabulary questions and tasks consistently focus students on the words, phrases, and sentences that matter most and how they are used in the text.
- 3: Vocabulary questions and tasks mostly focus students on the words that matter most and how they are used in the text.
- 2: Vocabulary questions and tasks rarely focus students on the words that matter most and how they are used in the text.
- 1: No questions and tasks focus students on the words that matter most and how they are used in the text.
- N/A: There is no text present in the lesson.

**D.** Questions and tasks are sequenced to build knowledge by guiding students to delve deeper into the text and graphics.

NOT OBSERVED

- 4: Most questions and tasks are intentionally sequenced to support building knowledge.
- 3: Some questions and tasks are intentionally sequenced to support building knowledge.
- 2: Few questions and tasks are intentionally sequenced to support building knowledge.
- 1: Questions and tasks seem random and are not intentionally sequenced to support building knowledge.
- N/A: There is no text present in the lesson.

INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE GUIDE

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Observer name: \_\_\_\_\_

**CORE ACTION 3** Provide all students with opportunities to engage in the work of the lesson.

INDICATORS: Note evidence observed or gathered for each indicator or rating.

RATING

RATING SCALE

- 4: Teacher provides many opportunities, and most students take them.
- 3: Teacher provides many opportunities, and some students take them; or teacher provides some opportunities and most students take them.
- 2: Teacher provides some opportunities, and some students take them.
- 1: Teacher provides few or no opportunities, or few or very few students take the opportunities provided.

**A.** The **teacher** poses questions and tasks for students to do the majority of the work: speaking/listening, reading, or writing.  
**Students** do the majority of the work of the lesson. 4 3 2 1  
 NOT OBSERVED

**B.** The **teacher** cultivates reasoning and meaning-making by allowing students to productively struggle.  
**Students** persevere through difficulty. 4 3 2 1  
 NOT OBSERVED

**C.** The **teacher** expects evidence and precision from students and probes students’ answers accordingly.  
**Students** provide text evidence to support their ideas and display precision in their oral or written responses. 4 3 2 1  
 NOT OBSERVED

**D.** The **teacher** creates the conditions for student conversations where students are encouraged to talk about each other’s thinking.  
**Students** talk and ask questions about each other’s thinking to clarify or improve their understanding. 4 3 2 1  
 NOT OBSERVED

**E.** The **teacher** deliberately checks for understanding throughout the lesson and adapts the lesson according to student understanding.  
When appropriate, **students** refine written or oral responses. 4 3 2 1  
 NOT OBSERVED

**F.** When appropriate, the **teacher** explicitly attends to strengthening students’ language and reading foundational skills. (The CCSS for Reading: Foundational Skills are applicable for grades 3-5 only.)  
**Students** demonstrate use of language conventions and decoding skills, activating such strategies as needed to read, write, and speak with grade-level fluency and skill. 4 3 2 1  
 NOT OBSERVED

Connect. Belong. Support.

# UPDATES

## CELEBRATE LEARNING FORWARD'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY

Join us at 6 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 8, to celebrate 50 years of learning and leading at the 2019 Learning Forward Annual Conference in St. Louis, Missouri. Enjoy hors d'oeuvres and birthday cake, connect with colleagues, and cultivate new relationships during this fun and festive informal networking event. Cheers!



## ANNUAL CONFERENCE EXTRAS

### LIVE STUDENT REPORTING



At Learning Forward's 2019 Annual Conference, you'll have the chance to learn not only from your peers but also from a corps of secondary school students. Student volunteers learning about video production and journalism will conduct live, on-the-spot reporting at the conference, to be held Dec. 7-11 in St. Louis, Missouri. Come prepared to engage with these young people as they ask you about your experience,

professional learning, and how your work impacts your teaching and their learning.

### PODCAST COLLABORATION



myPD Unplugged, a popular podcast on professional learning, is teaming up with Learning Forward to record several interviews at Learning Forward's Annual Conference. The podcast, hosted by a team of learning professionals from Long Beach Unified School District, will bring together multiple voices from the education community to advance professional learning in service to students. Listen at [podcasts.com/mypd-unplugged-ada79e545](https://podcasts.com/mypd-unplugged-ada79e545).

### LEARNING FORWARD BLOG

Stay up-to-date with insights and projects from Learning Forward staff, consultants, partners, and members by reading Learning Forward's blog.

In a recent post, Nikki Mouton shares her professional journey from science teacher to district administrator to Learning Forward staff member.



Nikki Mouton

Andrew Wayne from the American Institutes for Research writes about how to scale up proven professional learning approaches. He shares insights from a research project on scaling up the My Teaching Partner coaching model being conducted by AIR, Learning Forward, and Teachstone.

Visit the blog at [learningforward.org/blog](https://learningforward.org/blog).



## New early literacy initiative

Learning Forward is partnering with CenterPoint Education Solutions in a new early literacy initiative funded by the Robin Hood Learning + Technology Fund. This initiative will work with 19 schools in District 19 in Brooklyn, New York, as they make a transition from a traditional, paper-

based, whole-group instructional model to a blended learning model grounded in a high-quality literacy curriculum.

This two-year project will include development of early learning strategies and tools along with professional learning plans, curriculum implementation playbooks, and

educator tool kits as well as on-site and virtual coaching and working sessions with school leaders and district staff.

The tools will be designed to be scaled to support early literacy programs across the country.



# Learning in Canada's Northwest Territories

Learning Forward was in the Northwest Territories of Canada recently working with rural teachers, coaches, and school leaders in Inuvik to implement teacher-led learning teams in their schools.

More than 100 teachers, 30 school leaders, and 15 coaches from across the region participated in an exploration of the five-step learning team cycle, as well as effective leadership and coaching practices to support teachers in working through the cycle.

Teachers focused on how the learning team cycle facilitates collective efficacy and impacts instructional practice, then explored each of the

five stages: analyzing data, setting SMART goals, learning individually and collaboratively, implementing new learning, and monitoring, assessing, and adjusting practice.

Leaders explored their roles in supporting implementation of learning teams and factors that support meaningful collaboration, including vision and leadership, clear team goals, and commitment to collective responsibility. Coaches focused on a cycle of planning, implementing, modeling, co-teaching, observation, and reflection that supports teachers in transferring successful team learning into sustained practice.



Photo by MICHELLE BOWMAN  
Sculpture at East Three Secondary School, Inuvik, Northwest Territories.

The work was sponsored by the Beaufort Delta Education Council, which serves eight communities in far northern Canada.

## Twitter chat on school counselors

Learning Forward hosted a Twitter chat recently on the importance of professional learning for school counselors with experts Mandy Savitz-Romer of the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Alice Anne Bailey of the Southern Regional Education Board.

The chat was based on Savitz-Romer's article in the June 2019 issue of *The Learning Professional*, "No counselor left behind." Guests and participants shared strategies for job-embedded professional learning with school counselors, resources about making counselors' roles and learning more strategic, and the value of the Standards for Professional Learning for counselors.

In case you missed it, you can read the chat using **#CollaborativePD**. To be notified of future Twitter chats, follow us **@LearningForward** and **#LearnFwdTLP**.



## FEATURED SOCIAL MEDIA POST



**Kellie Ady @kellie80 Aug 23**

The latest issue of *The Learning Professional* from @LearningForward is focused on personalizing learning ([learningforward.org/journal/person...](http://learningforward.org/journal/person...)). The title and content reminded me of this powerful quote from @michaelbhorn:

Instead, I increasingly think of "personalizing learning" as a verb. Educators are personalizing learning for their students, or helping their students personalize their own learning. The key question right now shouldn't be about defining "it," but instead objectively observing, categorizing, and measuring the different ways educators and students are personalizing learning and understand which approaches are and are not getting the results they seek.

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

## APPLY FOR THE 2019 LEARNING TEAM AWARD

We want to celebrate the great learning taking place in your school.

The Shirley Hord Teacher Learning Team Award honors a team of teachers that engages in a cycle of continuous improvement for professional learning that improves team members' own teaching and their students' learning.

To apply, submit a short video of your learning team in action along with the award application.

Learning Forward and award sponsor Corwin will celebrate the winning team at Learning Forward's 2019 Annual Conference in St. Louis, Missouri. The winning team receives a cash gift of \$2,500 for the school, complimentary three-day registrations at the conference, airfare, and three hotel rooms for learning team members, and more.

The submission deadline is Oct. 26. Learn more and apply at [learningforward.org/get-involved/awards](http://learningforward.org/get-involved/awards).

# AT A GLANCE

## School leaders' biggest challenges

In our recent Learning Leaders Survey, we asked education professionals:  
What are the three most pressing challenges you face in your job right now?

Principals and assistant principals' challenges varied according to their level of experience.



— TIME IN CURRENT POSITION —

# 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: LEARNING COMMUNITIES</b></p> <p><b>IN ACTION</b></p> <p><b>Educators gain insight and support when they learn together in collaborative communities. But finding the time and opportunities for learning communities can be challenging for school leaders, who already tend to feel isolated.</b></p> <p>On p. 36, Erin Axelsen and colleagues describe an innovative approach to overcoming the logistical barriers by using technology for a group of principals to engage in book study together.</p>	<p><b>TO CONSIDER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the barriers in your school, district, or organization to leaders engaging in learning communities?</li> </ul> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What creative strategies and resources can you use to overcome them?</li> </ul> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p><b>STANDARD: IMPLEMENTATION</b></p> <p><b>IN ACTION</b></p> <p><b>As the primary instructional leaders in a school, principals are responsible for overseeing and improving the practice of teachers across subject areas and grade levels. How do leaders develop the expertise to support this diverse range of educators?</b></p> <p>On p. 32, Sarah Quebec Fuentes and Jo Beth Jimerson write about tackling instructional mismatch. They focus on the need for leaders to see themselves as learners and seek opportunities to develop in the areas where they are least experienced.</p>	<p><b>TO CONSIDER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you and your leadership team handle instructional mismatch when choosing instructional materials and the professional learning needed to implement them well?</li> </ul> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quebec Fuentes and Jimerson propose a one-year "Leadership Content Knowledge Challenge." What could this look like in your school, district, or organization? What would you seek to learn?</li> </ul> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <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).



“ One of the greatest impacts from teams implementing the PLC+ framework is teacher agency and collective efficacy. Teachers feeling that as a group they can make a difference. —Douglas Fisher ”

## What makes **PLC+** unique?

The PLC+ framework is aimed at reinvigorating current collaborative structures and bridging the crucial gap between the exclusive examination of student learning and *teaching*. PLC+ empowers educators to take control over their own learning and assess their impact on instructional practices through individual and collective efficacy, expectations, equity, and the activation of their own learning.

The *plus* in PLC+ is you. **The teacher.**

### Thought Leaders



Douglas Fisher



Nancy Frey

### Meet the Co-authors and Consultants



John Almarode

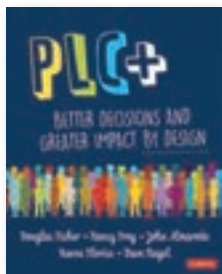


Karen Flories



Dave Nagel

### PLC+ Resources



Introduction & overview



Hands-on implementation



Planning and implementation guidance

### Corwin PLC+ Institutes

Oct 24–25, 2019 | New Orleans, LA  
Nov 14–15, 2019 | Oahu, HI  
Feb 3–4, 2020 | San Antonio, TX  
Mar 5–6, 2020 | Knoxville, TN  
Mar 9–10, 2020 | Tacoma, WA  
Apr 27–28, 2020 | Chicago, IL