

THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL

THE LEARNING FORWARD JOURNAL

PLUS
STUDENT
AUTHORS
ON HOW TO
IMPROVE
TEACHING

STUDENT VOICE

WHAT WE CAN LEARN BY LISTENING

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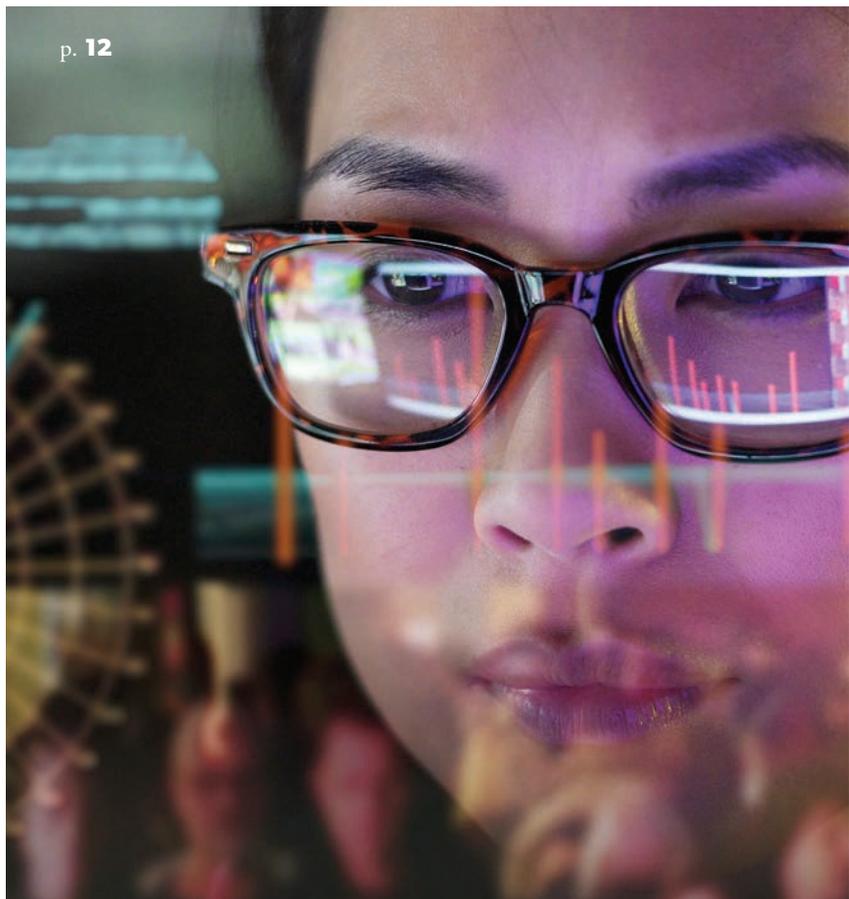
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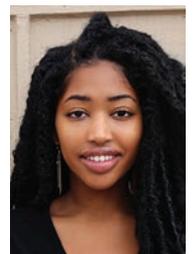
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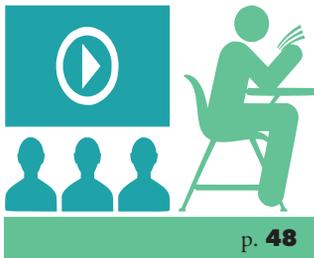
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Joshua Dantzler

Director of social media at Student Voice



“You can't have conversations about student experiences without students at the table. [Educators need to be] thoughtful about that student experience and student engagement.”

“An update from the Tour Across America's Schools,” Student Voice podcast, July 16, 2019

www.stuvoice.org/podcasts/update-from-the-tour-across-americas-schools





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HERE WE GO

Suzanne Bouffard

An eloquent 17-year-old graciously pointed to my use of the word *for* and explained that she and her collaborators want to shift the narrative to be about educators working *with* students.

Suzanne Bouffard (suzanne.bouffard@learningforward.org) is editor of *The Learning Professional*.

WHAT DO STUDENTS NEED? LET'S ASK THEM

Conversations about students' needs are at the center of great schools. To determine those needs, we examine performance data, observe teaching practices, synthesize research. But how often do we listen to the perspectives of those we aim to help — students themselves?

In any other industry, it is common practice to look through the lens of end users or target audiences. Organizations regularly survey their customers, clients, or beneficiaries. This is not the norm in most schools.

Some schools do survey students about their perceptions of school climate, implement student-led parent-teacher conferences, and invite students to weigh in on policy changes. These approaches are encouraging. But they only make a difference if we listen to what students are telling us and follow through with action.

Professional learning is an essential avenue for ensuring that student voice translates into real change. With systems for reflecting and acting on student insight, we can keep student survey results from gathering virtual dust on a computer server and passionate arguments during advisory period from evaporating as soon as the bell rings.

In that spirit, we hope this issue of *The Learning Professional* is the beginning of an ongoing conversation in your schools and organizations, as well as our own.

For this issue's articles, we went straight to the source and asked students to tell us what they think professional learning leaders should know and address. We are honored to feature pieces by young people from diverse locations and perspectives, and we invite others to contribute to the conversation by posting on social media or emailing us.

We have also included articles by educators who are working hard to incorporate student voice and have advice to share about steps you can take in your own professional learning efforts. Plus, Kyle Schwartz tells the story of how her simple "I wish my teacher knew..." exercise went viral and sparked a global movement.

If you're like us, you may also want to *hear* from students — literally. Many of this issue's articles direct you to supplemental video or audio content, which you'll see marked with an icon. We hope they inspire you and encourage your students to speak up. Do you plan to ask your students what they wish teachers knew or suggest focus areas for professional learning? Make a video or write a blog post, and we'll share it (with appropriate student permissions).

A conversation with members of the Prichard Committee Student Voice Team had a major influence on the way I thought about this issue and our work going forward. As I talked about the importance of this topic for our members, I pointed out that in everything we do in education, we are ultimately working for students. An eloquent 17-year-old graciously pointed to my use of the word *for* and explained that she and her collaborators want to shift the narrative to be about educators working *with* students.

As you read this issue, I hope you'll consider: How can I work *with* my students, not just for them, and what can I learn *from* them? They have a lot to teach us, and we have a lot to learn. ■



THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL

THE LEARNING FORWARD JOURNAL

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INSPIRE. EXPRESS. ADVOCATE.

VOICES

I wish
my teacher
knew ...

Kyle Schwartz was a first-year teacher when she began a simple exercise that eventually sparked a global movement. She handed out sticky notes and asked each student to complete the following sentence: "I wish my teacher knew" The exercise gave her insight and connections with her students. She posted about it on Twitter one evening in 2015, and since then, her work has inspired teachers, leaders, and young people around the world.

— "A simple exercise builds bridges for change,"

p. **11**



We can only demand better professional learning when we know what it entails.

Tracy Crow is chief strategy officer at Learning Forward.

CALL TO ACTION

Tracy Crow

LET'S PUT AN END TO WASTED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING DAYS

I recently heard about a troubling professional learning experience from one of the teachers I spoke with at Learning Forward's Annual Conference in St. Louis last December. He had just spent a district professional development day learning to teach high schoolers how to make a tray of nachos. Yes, you read that correctly.

While his colleagues who teach core subjects like math and reading spent the day in content-oriented team learning, every "leftover" teacher from grades K-12 — music, physical education, health, business, and others — focused on nachos. The district staff leading the activity didn't connect the exercise to any stated outcomes, and this teacher knew his district had wasted a precious opportunity.

Why does this sort of thing happen? And more importantly, what can we do about it?

Such wasted learning days happen for a range of reasons. Two that we see most commonly may have been at play in this teacher's district: a lack of district vision and no meaningful educator input.

Lack of district vision for professional learning. When a professional learning system is aligned with a districtwide vision for teaching and learning, educators' learning is relevant to their classrooms. However, not all districts have a clear vision, or they write an impressive vision statement but fail to ensure that all educators know or understand it. Others fail to extend it to connect their vision to existing professional learning structures.

No meaningful educator input on their learning. Many districts have recognized the value of offering educators voice and choice in their learning, which can help ensure relevance, buy-in, and reciprocal learning. But when educators don't have input, they may believe there's no point in demanding better than nachos, especially when wasted learning days have been the norm and shaped educators' understanding of what professional development is.



What can we do to change these patterns? Leadership and vision are critical elements, starting with two things all leaders and advocates can do: increase awareness and elevate educator voice.

Increase awareness about how to best use professional learning time.

Because Learning Forward has been working on this challenge for decades,

we know that often a limited number of educators in a system have the authority or resources to drive the design of professional learning. But it is up to all of us, regardless of our role, to spread the word about what high-quality professional learning is to colleagues both within and outside our districts and organizations. We can only demand better professional learning when we know what it entails.

Elevate educator voice and student data. School and district leaders who prioritize adult learning create cultures where teachers and other educators are safe to speak up for their needs and where even students, as we discuss throughout this issue of *The Learning Professional*, have a say in the support their teachers need.

Continued on p. 10



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Linda Alloju

REFLECTION STRATEGIES PREPARE STUDENTS FOR THE FUTURE

Current role: Science teacher at Plano West High School in Plano, Texas.

Originally from: Round Rock, Texas.

Years teaching: 14.

Subjects taught: Biology, chemistry, environmental science, environmental systems, anatomy and physiology, earth and space science.

Other responsibilities: District curriculum writer, new teacher mentor.

Current professional focus:

Helping my students become future-ready. They are so smart, but they don't yet have the skills to show their worth and succeed in the world, like presenting out loud or navigating tricky situations. So while I'm teaching them science, I focus on teaching them how to study and be self-reflective and on other life skills like communication.

I didn't learn those things when I went to high school and college. When I went to college, I did what I had always done — memorize the material — and I cried when I got a 35 on my first test. And I thought, "How come none of my teachers prepared me for this?"

Why she emphasizes reflection: You have to reflect on yourself to make yourself better. But I find that a lot of science teachers don't do that kind of work with their students. After my students take a test, we analyze the test results together. We don't just go over which answers are correct. We also talk about why they missed the questions they did. Did they misread the question, get overwhelmed by it, or something else? Then we talk about different strategies for comprehension and studying, and I ask them to reflect on what they will do differently next time.

At the end of the semester, I have them reflect on what works and doesn't work for their learning, and I also ask what I can do and what they can do themselves to help them improve. I can't help them improve if I am not reflecting on my practices based on their needs.

How she's helping other teachers learn from her experience: I shared some of these reflection strategies with a colleague at my school, then it started to spread. So I decided to apply to present about it at a district professional learning meeting. It really resonated, and not just with high school teachers. A lot of middle school teachers came to my session, and nine out of 10 of them said, "We should start doing this now, in middle school." Now I'm applying to present at a national biology teachers conference about it.



At the end of the semester, I have them reflect on what works and doesn't work for their learning, and I also ask what I can do and what they can do themselves to help them improve.

Why and how she's learning to write curriculum: Plano ISD has a standard curriculum across the district that is written by teachers. The goal is to make sure that all students are learning the same content, although teachers may teach it in slightly different ways.

Any teacher can attend a curriculum design institute the district holds and then apply to be a curriculum writer. If you're selected, you receive training and support and you write the curriculum together over the summer. The district then provides professional learning to roll out the changes to teachers.

I decided to be part of the curriculum writing program because I have so many ideas I want to share. Working with a district team allows me and the other writers to reach as many students as possible, not just those in our own classrooms.

How she got involved with Learning Forward: Learning Forward participates in Plano ISD's externship program for teachers. The city has a very successful and competitive internship program for students, and they built on that to develop something similar for teachers so they could see what it's like to work in an environment other than school and

I want to be engaged in a conversation, or discuss a "what would you do?" scenario, so I can learn about the how.

see what they are preparing students for. Through that program, I found out about all the amazing resources Learning Forward offers and decided to apply for the externship. I ended up getting to help with the 2019 Summer Institute in Boston.

What she and her students learned from the externship: The students who were applying for internships had to do the same application process that I was doing for the externship, so I shared with them how I did my resume, helped them prepare for interviews, and used strategies like small-group discussions and presentations during class and explained why it's important to be able to do those things.

Since the externship, I have been sprinkling stories and examples during class. For example, I talk about how it's important to find a need and fill it. During the institute, one of my responsibilities was making sure presenters got where they needed to

go on time. Because of some severe weather, a lot of flights were delayed, and it caused a lot of stress.

I tell the students how I needed to be flexible, but also how I needed to figure out what was needed and fill that need without waiting to be asked. I also tell them about how important it is to communicate well and respectfully with people, even when people are complaining a lot or being difficult. I explained that you have to decide how you're going to react when people say all kinds of things to you.

Her best and worst professional learning experiences: The worst are workshops that tell and don't show and that focus exclusively on why to do something without explaining how. So much of the time, a presenter is reading from a PowerPoint slide with super small letters.

I want to be engaged in a conversation, or discuss a "what would you do?" scenario, so I can learn about the how. The Learning Forward Summer Institute was my favorite experience — honestly! — because I had so many deep, meaningful conversations with people I wouldn't have met otherwise. I got so many ideas of things I would like to try. ■

CALL TO ACTION / Tracy Crow

Continued from p. 8

But offering voice and choice is not enough. Educators need the knowledge, skills, and tools to understand and use data — student, educator, school, and district data — to plan their learning. Leaders must intentionally support educators to build those skills and resources.

Our responsibility as the membership association for professional learning means Learning Forward will continue to use *The Learning*

We will also continue our campaign to ensure every educator is an advocate for his or her learning and the learning of his or her peers.

Professional, our Annual Conference, and many other outlets to support leaders of learning to expand their expertise and influence. We will also continue our campaign to ensure every

educator is an advocate for his or her learning and the learning of his or her peers.

The teacher I spoke with at the conference clearly knew he deserved more and that his learning is a priority. We thank him and all of you for taking steps each day to abolish practices that waste time, money, and most importantly, educators' valuable energy. ■



WHAT I'VE LEARNED

Kyle Schwartz

A SIMPLE EXERCISE BUILDS BRIDGES FOR CHANGE

When Kyle Schwartz was a first-year teacher at Doull Elementary School in Denver, Colorado, she sensed a disconnect with her students. So in the middle of the year, she engaged them in a simple exercise: She handed out sticky notes and asked each student to complete the following sentence: "I wish my teacher knew" Then she asked them to fold up their papers and hand them in.

Schwartz hoped the exercise would give her insight and build connections to improve her relationships with students, and it did. But she didn't expect it to spark a global movement and make her a well-known author and speaker, which is what happened when she posted about it on Twitter one evening in 2015.

Since then, her work has inspired teachers, leaders, and young people around the world. Her first book, *I Wish My Teacher Knew: How One Question Can Change Everything for Our Kids*, has sold over 60,000 copies. Her new book is *I Wish for Change: Unleashing the Power of Kids to Make a Difference*. Learning Forward's Suzanne Bouffard recently spoke with her about the movement she started and why student perspectives are important for educator learning .

TED TALK



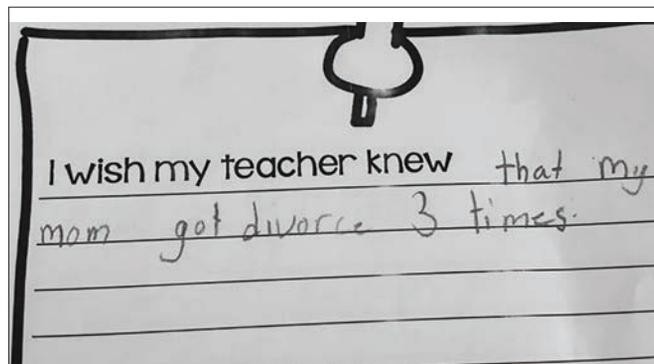
<http://www.tedxkyoto.com/en/events/tedxkyoto-2016/what-kids-wish-their-teachers-knew-kyle-schwartz-tedxkyoto>

Teachers tell me that the book has helped introduce language about regulation and dysregulation, and about trauma, so there is a shift away from calling students disrespectful, for example, and toward understanding why they're behaving the way they are.

Q How did the "I wish my teacher knew" movement start?

A: The roots of the movement are very humble and genuine. I did the exercise with my students for three years before I told anyone about it. One night, I found one of the notes crumpled up, and I reread it. It said, "I wish my teacher knew that I don't have pencils at home to do my homework." I remembered how that note had struck me and changed my perspective about the student.

I saw something worth sharing in that note, so I took a picture and uploaded it to Twitter. Other teachers saw it and right away they said, "I'm going to do this in my class." I thought maybe five people would try it. I'm astounded at how far it has gone. I get messages from people all over the world. I have gotten notes in Japanese and German and Arabic and Urdu.



Schwartz's book has sparked conversations about teachers' and administrators' assumptions about students.

Q: The exercise, and your book, have become a form of professional learning, even though you didn't originally intend for that. How are educators using this and learning from it?

A: I have heard from schools that are using it for a book study, to spark conversations and reflections about teachers' and administrators' assumptions about students. I have even heard from some districts, including one in Alabama and one in Utah, where all staff in the district were asked to read it.

And, of course, many teachers are using the exercise in their classrooms and learning about their students and their practice from it. The really interesting thing is how kids have taken it on. Some of them have anonymously sent my TED Talk to their teacher or done a feature on the exercise in the school newspaper.

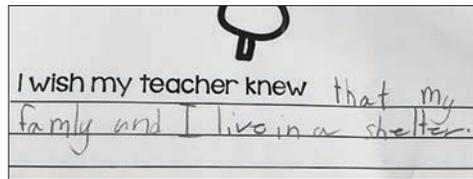
I've also heard from some brave teachers who have modified the exercise to be "I wish my principal knew ..." or "I wish my superintendent knew ..." A university administrator told me that he did "I wish my boss knew ..." One of his longtime subordinates wrote, "I wish my boss knew that my child is chronically ill." The boss had been working with him for years and never knew, and he immediately told the employee he wished he had known so he could support him. The message people are sending their bosses is "If you only knew more about us, you could be a better leader for us."

It is a different type of professional learning from what we often see, and I really applaud the schools that are doing this and having the difficult conversations it brings up. I'm honored by that. Teachers tell me it has given them the information to connect with and help students they have been struggling to reach.

But I think the biggest shift is that it's creating a shared language in schools. Teachers tell me that the book has helped introduce language about regulation and dysregulation, and about trauma, so there is a shift away from calling students disrespectful, for example, and toward understanding why they're behaving the way they are.

Q: How is the book having an impact on preservice teacher preparation?

A: The book is on a lot of college syllabuses for preservice teachers. I'm really encouraged by that. Nine years ago, I went through an amazing, rigorous teacher education program, but relationships, connection, and trauma were words that were hardly used in our course work. Fortunately, I



Many teachers now use this exercise in their classrooms.

spent a year teaching with a mentor in a high-needs classroom, and my mentor was my professional learning about relationship building. But if that had been more of a focus in my program, I would have started in my own classroom more prepared than I was.

I'm so encouraged by how many university students have reached out to me and told me they are using and discussing the exercise. It's become part of the conversation. I'm hoping there is a shift in education, because the daily work of teaching is relationship building, but that hasn't been credited as a skill set to develop. You have to learn how to form these relationships, and that work is just as valuable as everything else we do.

Q: Why do you think the "I wish my teacher knew" exercise has resonated so strongly?

A: Everybody wants to be known. The exercise really gets at the heart of creating relationships and building connections.

When I started doing speeches, I was surprised that people were exploding to tell me about their own experiences in school when they were young. One time, a woman jumped into an elevator with me to tell me about her own experience losing her mother as a child and how her family told her never to let people at school know. She said she wishes a teacher had done the exercise with her.

A lot of times, this need for relationships and connections isn't honored in professional learning. I remember a professional development workshop on math that I went to, and at lunchtime, teachers were saying, "I can't get to this stuff because there's so much

going on. I have 29 kids in a class and no paraprofessionals, and not enough planning time. Now, they want us to rewrite the curriculum." Professional learning has to acknowledge the realities of teaching. A technique or practice isn't a "best practice" if it can't exist in a human classroom.

And we need our leaders and policies to support us in this relationship work. There is such a thing as secondary trauma, which many of us teachers experience when we are working with and connecting with students who have experienced trauma. It can be stressful and exhausting. And when people talk about the teacher self-care movement, I say, "Yes, and ..." Sometimes hearing from nonteachers that I just need to engage in self-care makes me feel patronized, or like it's putting all the burden on teachers.

Teachers need to engage in self-care just as anyone else, but we also need a reasonable workload and support in the classroom. Teachers need access to mental health care and a fair salary. And they need to be evaluated on the whole picture of what they're doing in classrooms, not just on certain skills. We need substantial structural change and support. We can't self-care our way out of the stresses we face.

Q: How does your new book, *I Wish for Change*, build on the movement?

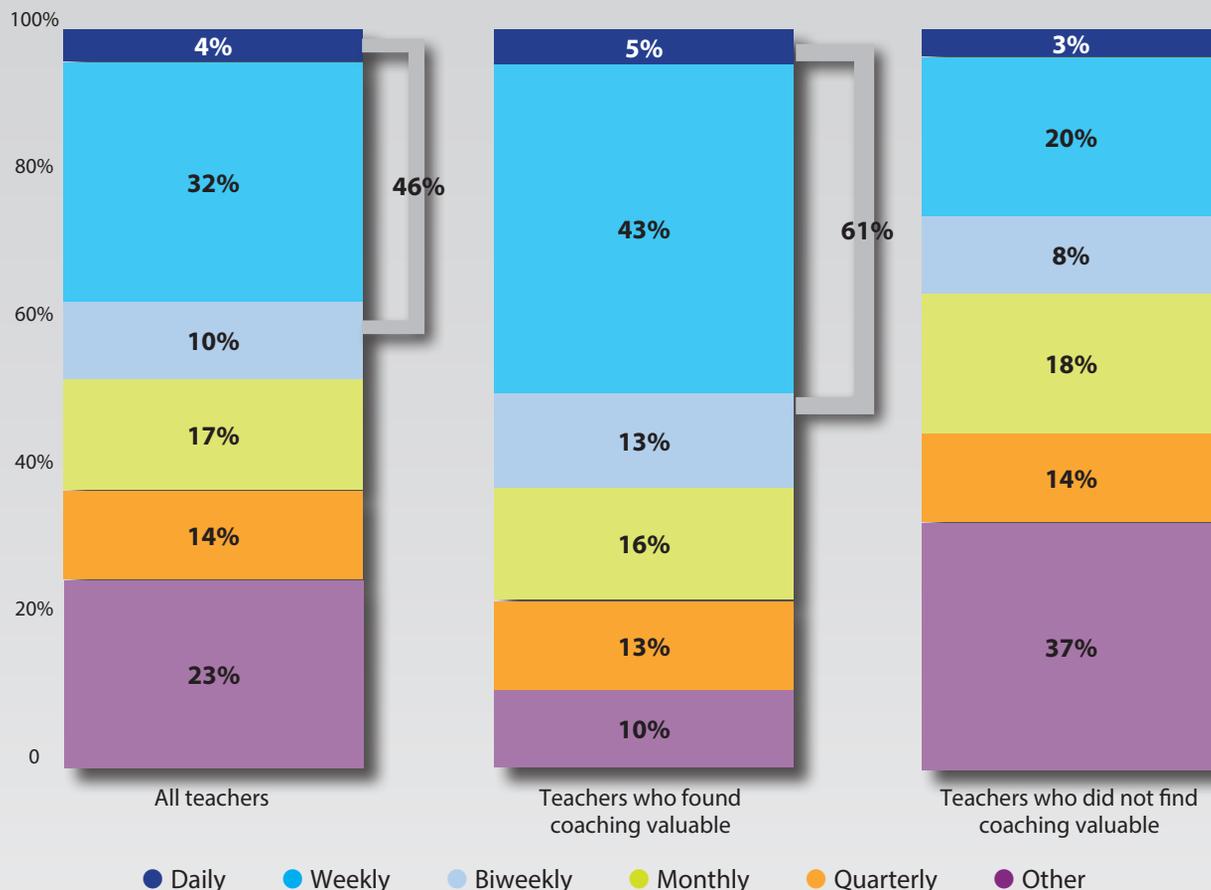
A: The next step, after creating connections with kids, is empowering them. *I Wish for Change* is about helping kids find what they are passionate about and make a difference in the world. How can they affect their community in a positive way? That's a need we all have, and it is grounded in our need for belonging.

When kids don't feel like they belong, they pour their energy into ending their own isolation, sometimes not in positive ways. We have to help them see that they are agents of change. I often tell my students: "You are not here so you can make money in a decade. You are here so you can make a difference now." ■

EXAMINE. STUDY. UNDERSTAND.

RESEARCH

FREQUENCY OF TEACHER MEETINGS WITH COACHES, BY VALUATION OF COACHING



MORE COACHING, MORE IMPACT

A recent survey by Learning Forward and Digital Promise found that, although 61% of teachers who find coaching valuable have at least biweekly meetings with their coaches, only 46% of teachers meet with their coaches that frequently. On average, teachers who spend more time with their coach rate their coaching as very or highly valuable.

Source: Van Ostrand, K., Seylar, J., & Luke, C. (2020). *Prevalence of coaching and approaches to supporting coaching in education*. Washington, DC: Digital Promise.

READ MORE about the study on p. **14**



RESEARCH REVIEW

Elizabeth Foster

SURVEY SHEDS LIGHT ON THE STATE OF COACHING

Coaching is a popular and promising form of professional learning, with research evidence of its effectiveness for teachers and students (Kraft, Blazar, & Hogan, 2018). Surprisingly little is known, however, about the current landscape of coaching.

To close this knowledge gap, Learning Forward recently partnered with Digital Promise to survey more than 1,000 U.S. educators about their experiences with coaching. We aimed to learn more about the prevalence of coaching, financial and logistical support, and perceptions of its value. This information can provide a useful benchmark for coaching investments, against which we can plan and measure the outcomes of our ongoing advocacy and capacity-building efforts with districts and states.

Collaborating with Digital Promise, which works to build equity, access, and quality of learning opportunities to people at all life stages, helped us reach a national network of coaches, educators, and administrators committed to professional learning.

The report from the project, *Prevalence of Coaching and Approaches to Supporting Coaching in Education* (Van Ostrand, Seylar, & Luke, 2020), was released last month.



METHOD

Digital Promise and Learning Forward collaborated to design an online survey using validated questions from the Digital Promise Dynamic Learning Project, an effort to build the capacity of school-based coaches, especially in helping teachers incorporate technology into their teaching. The survey link was emailed to educators and education leaders last October, and 1,246 participants representing all 50 U.S. states responded.

Overall, 83% of respondents reported being engaged in coaching in a school or district, either in a coaching capacity or as a coachee. The remaining respondents were not engaged in coaching and therefore not included in subsequent analyses.

The majority of respondents in the analysis are coaches, followed by administrators, educators, and “other,” which included curriculum coordinators, instructional specialists, and special education support staff.

The majority of respondents are female, have more than 15 years of experience in K-12 education, and are distributed fairly evenly across grade levels K-12. Slightly more serve in school-based roles (55.1%) than district-based roles (44.9%).

WHO HAS ACCESS TO COACHING?

All survey respondents reported on the demographic composition of their school sites.

More than two-thirds of the respondents are from schools or districts with more than 40% of students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch, perhaps because they access Title I dollars for coaching support. Consistent with prior research on coaching prevalence, as reported in the December 2019 issue of *The Learning Professional*, more respondents worked in suburban

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and urban schools than rural schools (Learning Forward, 2019).

COACHES' WORKLOADS

Responses about the number of roles and the number of educators supported indicate a full workload for coaches. Many coaches reported serving in other roles in addition to their role as a coach: 40% of school-based coaches are also classroom teachers, as are 17% of district-based respondents. Nearly half of school-based coaches serve more than 16 teachers at one time, while 65% of district-based coaches serve more than 16 teachers concurrently.

FREQUENCY AND DURATION

More than half of teachers (55%) reported that they spend less than 30 minutes per session with their coaches; 40% spend 30 to 60 minutes per session, with the remaining 5% spending more than 60 minutes per session. This finding is concerning, given that the **Implementation standard** of Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning states that professional learning must be of significant duration to have a meaningful impact.

FUNDING

The survey results reveal that funding consistency is a challenge. Among respondents, fewer than half of coaches are funded at consistent rates: Only 43% of district-based administrators reported that coaches are funded multiyear, and 37% percent of school-based administrators said the same of their coaches.

While this is not a surprise, documenting such hurdles is important as we advocate for more sustained

ADDITIONAL COACHING RESOURCES FROM LEARNING FORWARD

- *Coaching Matters*, by Joellen Killion, Cindy Harrison, Chris Bryan, and Heather Clifton. Available at learningforward.org/store or order by phone at 800-727-7288.
- *Taking the Lead*, by Joellen Killion and Cindy Harrison. Available at learningforward.org/store or order by phone at 800-727-7288.
- *Coaching for Impact*. Available at learningforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/coaching-for-impact.pdf.
- December 2019 issue of *The Learning Professional* on coaching. Available at learningforward.org/journal/coaching.

funding for professional learning. The **Resources standard** in the Standards for Professional Learning outlines why consistent and meaningful investment in funding, human capital, and other areas is essential to high-quality professional learning.

SATISFACTION WITH COACHING

More than three-quarters of educator respondents find coaching valuable, ranging from somewhat to highly valuable. A similar percentage of educator respondents find coaching to have a positive impact on their practice.

However, for teachers, levels of satisfaction varied according to how much time teachers spend with their

coaches. Overall, teachers who spend more time with their coach are more likely to rate the coaching as valuable. For example, of those who found coaching valuable, 43% reported working with their coaches weekly while only 13% reported quarterly meetings with their coaches.

However, there is a troubling disconnect between these findings and those reported above that show fewer than half of teachers meet with their coaches at least biweekly and the majority spend less than 30 minutes per session with their coach. This calls into question whether coaching is receiving enough support and investment to make meaningful changes in teacher practice and student achievement.

Furthermore, Learning Forward and others have found that meaningful and engaging professional learning experiences can help support educator job satisfaction, particularly when those experiences support collegiality, reflection, and collaboration (Learning Forward, 2012), as reflected in the **Learning Communities standard** and the **Learning Designs standard**.

But if coaching experiences are not frequent and sustained, it may be difficult for them to meet these standards and therefore have a positive impact on teachers' job satisfaction, well-being, and retention.

COACHES' PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Almost 80% of coaches say their professional development is either very effective or somewhat effective. However, the survey question did not give a definition of "effective," leaving it up to respondents' interpretations. Encouragingly, more than three-

quarters of district-based administrators and school-based administrators reported that professional learning for coaches is multiyear and tailored to coaches' needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The report makes several recommendations for coaching efforts moving forward, including three that are particularly relevant for *The Learning Professional's* audience:

1. Teachers should have frequent and consistent time with their coaches.
2. Principals and district administrators should monitor coach workload and protect their time to be in classrooms and reflective time with teachers so they can have the greatest impact.
3. Long-term investments in coaching could help maintain

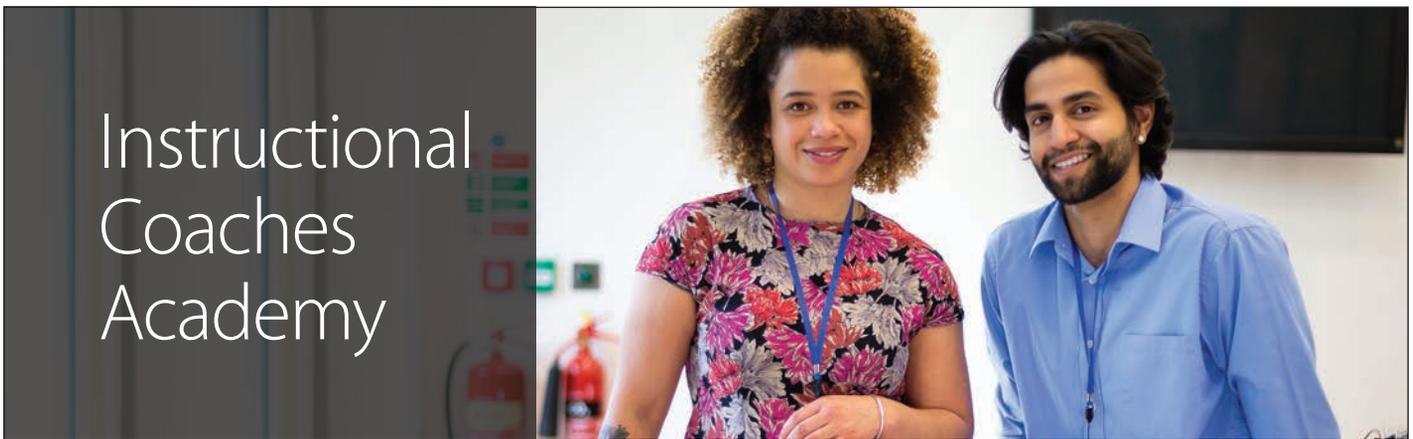
continuity from year to year, and federal and state funds dedicated specifically to coaching could make implementing this high-impact professional learning easier to sustain.

Overall, the results present a mixed picture of how well respondents' coaching experiences align with the Standards for Professional Learning. There are reasons to be hopeful about the prevalence and impact of coaching. But there is also room for improvement, particularly when it comes to making the investments necessary to ensure coaching is meaningful and effective.

We at Learning Forward are continuing to work toward ensuring those resources — financial, logistical, human, and other — are available to all coaches and teachers, and we applaud all of you who are doing the same.

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Effective coaches impact student outcomes

Learning Forward's Instructional Coaches Academy provides comprehensive learning and ongoing guidance for coaches and the leaders who support them. We give coaches the knowledge and skills they need to support great teaching and learning.

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- Building relationships
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- Coaching individuals and teams
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- Conducting classroom observations
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- Content and pedagogy;
- Coherence and relevance;
- Measurement and impact; and
- Professional learning culture.

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For more information, visit consulting.learningforward.org or contact Tom Manning at tom.manning@learningforward.org.

ESSENTIALS

72% MORE PHONICS INSTRUCTION

The New York City Department of Education released the second-year evaluation of Universal Literacy, an initiative to boost K-2 reading proficiency by deploying trained reading coaches. (An article about the initiative's Digital Daily Coaching Log appeared in the December 2019 issue of *The Learning Professional*.)

In the 14 New York City districts that participated, 236 reading coaches worked with more than 3,000 teachers. Coaches spent about 45% of their time with teachers in classrooms and about 25% in planning, professional learning, and other forms of preparation. Teachers who participated reported that they changed their practices as a result of the coaching: About 72% said they incorporated more phonics and phonemic awareness to a moderate or great extent, and more than 60% said they incorporated more fluency instruction and vocabulary instruction.

High percentages of teachers, coaches, and administrators reported that the coaching developed teachers' knowledge of content, effective instruction, awareness of resources for instruction, and approaches to assessment to a moderate or great extent.

bit.ly/36uaXB1

19% ATTRITION AMONG TEACHERS OF COLOR

Although the majority of public school students are people of color, fewer than 20% of teachers are. Part of the gap stems from teachers of color leaving the profession in higher numbers than white teachers — about 19% compared to about 15%.

To understand the reasons and identify strategies to help reverse the trend, The Education Trust and Teach

Plus conducted focus groups with black and Latino teachers as well as case studies in schools and districts that are making intentional efforts to recruit and retain teachers of color.

Five key themes emerged about factors driving attrition: experiencing an antagonistic school culture, feeling undervalued, being deprived of agency and autonomy, navigating unfavorable working conditions, and bearing the high cost of being a teacher of color. The report includes recommended actions for schools and districts.

bit.ly/39M00I1

35 STATES' TEACHER LEADERSHIP POLICIES

According to a new report from the National Council on Teacher Quality, 35 U.S. states now have formal teacher leadership policies. Such state policies can allow districts to allocate funds to these programs, which usually allow teachers to take on increasing responsibility and career status while also continuing to teach. However, only 21 of those states' policies give teacher leaders extra compensation or incentives. Some states allocate specific funds for these purposes, while others simply encourage them. In other states, funding decisions may be left to district discretion.

bit.ly/2FrYXE5

64% OF SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS 'NOT WORTH USING'

Research has shown that most teachers download supplemental instructional materials from unregulated Internet sites. With the help of researchers Morgan Polikoff and Jennifer Dean, the Fordham Institute dove into some of the most popular resources on three sites (Teaches Pay Teachers,

ReadWriteThink, and Share My Lesson) to assess their level of quality.

Reviewers of over 300 materials rated most of them as low quality, including 64% that were rated as "should not be used" or "probably not worth using." Across all three sites, most materials were rated 0 or 1 on a quality scale from 0 to 3.

The report's authors concluded that teachers and school leaders need more information about the materials they are selecting. That information, they suggest, "could inform an array of subsequent strategies for improvement, from offering teachers training in how to identify high-quality materials to publishing a list of curated supplemental resources and addressing shortcomings and gaps in their core curriculum."

bit.ly/39JevBs

#1 in trusted leadership

School principals are the most trusted category of leaders in the U.S., according to a study by the Pew Research Center. A survey of more than 10,000 adults found that Americans have more positive perceptions of school leaders than of police officers, military leaders, religious leaders, journalists, leaders of technology companies, local elected officials, and members of Congress. They rated principals as more caring and fair than other leaders, most likely to handle resources responsibly and accept responsibility for mistakes, and least likely to act unethically. This should be welcome news to education leaders who sometimes feel embattled.

pewrsr.ch/2s7YYu4

INFORM. ENGAGE. IMMERSE.

FOCUS

STUDENT VOICE

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES PUT KIDS AT THE CENTER

Students' perspectives can be a powerful driver for professional learning, as both youth and adult authors show in the following pages.

"People often talk about putting kids at the center, but no one talks about how. Kids can't be at the center if the adults don't have the capacity to understand their perspectives," says Mirko Chardin, principal of Putnam Avenue Upper School in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Here, Farai Sundai shares her "story of self" while classmate Alaan Clarke records it.

— "Learning is a two-way street," p. 28



Eliza Jane Schaeffer, at microphone, speaks on the Kentucky Capitol steps in March 2015 in support of a bill drafted by the Student Voice Team to add students to superintendent screening committees. Joining her are fellow students, from left: Anjali Shankar, Monica Alden, Parin Rekraj, Lauren Hall, Sahar Mohammadzadeh, Mahika Gupta, Sara Khandari, and Meghana Kudrimoti.



Members of the Student Voice Team work with students at Franklin-Simpson High School in Franklin, Kentucky, to conduct a student-led school climate audit during the 2017-18 school year.

STUDENTS AS EDUCATION PARTNERS

KENTUCKY STUDENT TEAM BRIDGES SCHOOL POLICY AND PRACTICE

BY EMANUELLE SIPPY AND RACHEL BELIN

From the Little Rock Nine and the Children's Crusaders during the civil rights movement to today's Dreamers and organizers of the March for Our Lives, young people have long been on the front lines of pushing for systemic change. The Prichard Committee Student Voice Team, consisting of 100 self-selected students from across Kentucky, works in that tradition to improve schools and society.

The Student Voice Team is an extension of the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, an organization that has been mobilizing citizens to improve education in Kentucky for nearly 40 years.

At its core, we believe that students can bring enormous added value in making schools better. We also believe that, along with teachers, young people on the front lines of our classrooms are in the best position to help bridge education policy and practice.

For our team, student voice is about recognizing that students are the primary stakeholders of their education and creating space for them to have agency in addressing significant issues that affect them, their schools, and their communities. We distinguish meaningful student voice — students

framing issues, co-designing and helping to implement solutions — from nonmeaningful student voice, which has students serving in more superficial or symbolic roles like sitting on a panel with a predetermined agenda.

We see teacher and student voice not as competing interests but as mutual ones. Our work is radical not because it is by youth and for youth, but because it is intergenerational. We believe that students and teachers can learn with one another about how to improve schools in ways that are ongoing and meaningful.

SCHOOL CLIMATE AND SAFETY

The need for student voice in school policy conversations is especially pronounced in the context of real-world issues that affect our schools and communities. The spate of school shootings and the national conversation about how to deal with school violence offer a prime example.

Like students across the country, the Student Voice Team has been shaken by the trend of school shootings, including one that occurred in Marshall County, Kentucky, just weeks before the widely reported shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida. But all the talk that followed about securing schools

ABOUT THE STUDENT VOICE TEAM

The Student Voice Team includes 100 students from across the state of Kentucky, but we don't speak just for ourselves. Elevating meaningful student voice demands making space for *all* students to have a role in decision-making, not just a selected few. We are focused on equity, so one of the most important questions we continually ask ourselves and others to consider is: What obligation do I have to students in my world who may be least heard in it?

Because our self-selection process tends to draw students who are successful in school, we know our members cannot represent fully the Kentucky student experience. To do so, we reach out to other students from all backgrounds primarily in the form of student-to-student interviews and roundtables.

We are also intentional about amplifying the voices of students who are least heard by sharing their stories on a range of platforms from social media and blogging to op-eds, policy reports, professional learning, and speaking engagements. We aim not to tell the stories of students *for* them but to encourage them to tell their own, whether we're talking with a handful of African American students about race in a predominantly white, rural school; visiting students at a school for the deaf to talk about the challenges of communicating with teachers who are not native sign language speakers; or listening to students in one of the most underresourced school districts speak to their experience of limited extracurricular opportunities.

with metal detectors and armed teachers didn't resonate with us. We knew the conversation about solutions should transcend school shootings and be part of conversations we were already having about students' connections to their schools and with each other.

As we were talking with students about their school communities and the issues that mattered most to them, we came upon some of the work of the National School Climate Center, which defines school climate as the quality and character of school life — that is, whether people feel physically, socially, and emotionally safe, included, and engaged in school. School climate involves myriad elements, including a school's norms and values and relationships between students and staff and among students.

The center's decades of academic research support the fact that a positive school climate directly correlates with better academic achievement, as young people who feel safe, included, and engaged in school tend to be much more motivated to do well in class. As if that weren't enough, we learned, attention to school climate is a matter of educational equity because a positive or negative school climate can have a disproportionately profound effect on minority students, students from low-income families, English learners, and students with special needs.

Yet, even when schools aim to build teachers' knowledge about cultivating positive school environments, they often fail to include student perspectives. We realized we could bring added value and influence to conversations about school climate and efforts to improve it. We had routinely engaged students and educators in conversations about students' roles in school governance and exploring ways for students to have more voice and agency, but school climate allowed us to focus our work.

This work is about much more than school violence, but the research we have reviewed tells us that there is a link — and that students have an important

role to play in advocating for safer and healthier school climates and building knowledge about how to create them.

STUDENT-LED AUDIT

Schools can't improve if they don't know where they are starting. With a grant from a local community foundation, we created a prototype of a student-led school climate audit so everyone in the school community can become informed and take action.

We knew students had been asked to participate in such audits before, but we were puzzled by the fact that they were never privy to the results. We wanted to test a model in which students themselves led the way, to ensure that the primary stakeholders would have a better understanding of the extent to which their school is a safe, supportive, and engaging place to learn.

In our approach, students facilitate focus groups and interviews, conduct site visits and classroom observations, and analyze school climate surveys. The data they collect can be acted on by students and teachers alike, learning and working together.

Just a few years into our venture, and with some generous guidance on survey design from Panorama Education, we've been gleaning a lot. One common theme we noticed right from the beginning is that it appears far too many high school students are feeling disconnected from school. Of the 1,552 students we surveyed in our first research cohort of three geographically diverse schools, only about a third reported feeling valued in school and invested in what they're learning.

Sometimes the results seem paradoxical. At one school, for example, 34% of students reported that their peers' behavior hindered their learning, yet 57% said they thought the rules for school were unfair. At another school, 30% admitted feeling "slightly" or "not at all eager" to participate in class, yet 85% believed it was important to do well in school.

Focus groups in these initial studies

further illuminated the numbers. At one school, a student confided, "I feel like I don't have a place I can go to and have people with personal experience and understanding about what it feels like to be a black Latina in a school full of white students."

We also got some decidedly hopeful feedback, especially as many of the students we interviewed affirmed the value of their relationships with teachers. "I think all of my teachers, whenever I'm having a really bad day, they can notice," one student observed. At a minimum, the results serve as fodder for richer, more reflective conversation about whether and how our schools are serving all learners.

MAKING CHANGE

Central to our student-led school climate audit model is a share-back session in which students design and facilitate dialogue in their school communities to make sense of the findings and cultivate solutions. In our experience, this kind of dialogue is rare in adult-led audits.

To do this, we have developed a simple infographic-heavy report format that integrates quantitative and qualitative data, and we ask students and staff to dig into it. We facilitate a conversation with open-ended questions like:

- What does this report suggest to you about this school?
- What else would you want to know about this school based on what you see?
- Who seems to be benefiting most and least from this school's climate, and why do you think this is?
- What can and should we do with this information to make this school a better learning environment for more people?

Our model is gaining traction across the state, prompting another major innovation to address the challenge of scale. Instead of Student Voice Team members conducting the audits as independent agents, we have



been working with districts to train and support students to lead climate audits in their own schools. The effort involves the design and testing of an open-source curriculum students and teachers can use to ensure a level of quality in their auditing and learn from some of our team's best mistakes. In these schools, students become leaders from whom teachers can learn.

MOVING THE PUBLIC POLICY NEEDLE

Several years into the prototyping, our grassroots school climate audits are starting to have an impact on larger public conversations and public policy.

In the context of the growing outcry over school shootings, our team held a teach-in and rally on the Kentucky Capitol steps, which drew a wide intergenerational audience from across the state. We drew on student feedback from the audits as well as academic

THE PRICHARD COMMITTEE STUDENT VOICE TEAM

Front row, from left: Amanda Byerman, Qhovia Phillips, Emma Falluji, Sarah Sajadi, Audrey Gilbert, Rachel Bradley.

Row 2, from left: Celia Ziliak, Autumn Wilson, Amy Yang, Hannah Botts, Sophie Farmer, Diksha Satish, Chloe Montgomery, Lee Monroe.

Row 3, from left: ViAsia Bramblett, Gabriella Staykova, Sanaa Kahloon, Nyasha Musoni, Zoe Jenkins, Pauline Hancock, Ashley Bishop, Mollie Pope.

Row 4, from left: Lily Gardner, Emily Krall, Kate Criner, Emanuelle Sippy, Afi Tagnedji, Sadie Bograd, Emma Nesmith, Lydia Burns, Meredith Crocket, Colton Williams.

Back row, from left: Will Byerman, Santiago O'Neil, Jack Lofwall, Isaiah Sullivan, Hayden Caldwell, Jack Bradley, Andrew Brennen, Hiatt Allen.

research to make our case and shape the narrative that attention to school climate and social and emotional well-being are essential to making schools safer. We also shared testimony before the Federal School Safety Commission using similar language.

We even used data from the audits to weigh in when a local property tax bill came up for consideration, urging the public to take an approach to school safety that lent itself to a broader discussion about school climate. This

groundwork led to a legislative victory when our team was asked to place a student on the School Safety Working Group, which was charged with developing the bipartisan framework for addressing Kentucky's safety concerns.

Our representative — a high school junior who had participated in a number of our independent audits — worked side-by-side with legislators, drawing on data from the schools we audited and inviting other students to testify

Continued on p. 27



WHAT STUDENTS CAN TELL US

TEACHERS BENEFIT FROM STUDENT PERCEPTION SURVEYS

BY NASUE NISHIDA AND HOLLI HANSON

Suzanne is a midcareer elementary teacher at what she feels is the height of her career. Her students do well on assessments and make progress on their school work. She receives proficient and distinguished ratings on her annual evaluations. Colleagues turn to her with questions, seeking her sage advice, and she often leads professional learning in her building and across her district. But Suzanne’s world tilted when she surveyed her students on their perceptions of instruction and her classroom.

Suzanne was surprised to

discover that students perceived the classroom environment as somewhat chaotic because it was loud and full of distractions. While her students appreciated her one-on-one rounds with each individual student, they felt that the rest of the classroom wasn’t well-managed or on-task during these times.

Suzanne realized this was something that she wouldn’t have discovered through a student assessment or a periodic evaluation from her principal. Furthermore, she realized she would need to reconsider how to implement the rounds strategy, which was a core part of her teaching and deeply personal to her practice.

Suzanne was part of a district team that participated in the Student Perception Project, a two-year opportunity for educators in Washington state to explore student perception surveys and how data students provide can inform educator practice.

Through this project, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and led by the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession, district teams explored and piloted student perception survey instruments that gleaned data about students’ take on their learning,

their teachers' instruction, and the classroom environment.

The key lesson of this project was that student perception data give teachers valuable information they can use to make immediate changes to their practice, along with the added benefit of helping students become active collaborators in their own learning. Washington's experience was so powerful that the state invested funds to create a bank of student perception items that any teacher in the state can access to create an online survey for students.

This work has challenged us at the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession and the educators we have worked with to consider student feedback as a viable data point in providing meaningful and relevant information about teacher practice and student learning. We are revisiting assumptions and challenging adult mindsets about student engagement and ownership of their learning in pursuit of what we hope will be better classroom experiences for students.

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS AS DATA

Businesses ask consumers continually for feedback on their products and services and frequently make changes accordingly. Students are the consumers of the classroom. As such, they can provide teachers with invaluable data and feedback about the classroom experience in service of their learning.

Teachers often use exit slips, written reflection, and other teacher-developed ways of gathering feedback from students. However, these forms of

data collection are ad hoc and usually informal, and they may not yield information that is actually useful to refining teacher practice.

In contrast, when educators use student perception surveys about instruction and the classroom, they get specific and actionable data from students. Many schools use other types of student perception surveys — for example, focused on a school's culture and climate — which can be helpful but are often not directly relevant to specific teachers' instruction. This is why the Student Perception Project focused on asking students about highly specific teaching methods and classroom interactions.

In Washington, we culled student perception survey items from open source surveys across the country. With teachers, administrators, and survey experts, items were tested and piloted with thousands of students in Washington to meet validity and reliability sniff tests. Based on student and teacher feedback during the testing and piloting phases, the number of survey items was narrowed down and item language was adapted or revised.

The menu of survey items available to teachers is still relatively large — upwards of 70 — but it does allow teachers to be selective about the area(s) of their practices for which they seek feedback and information from students. As this resource is used more and more, we anticipate revisiting the item bank to find out which survey items teachers are selecting more frequently than others and/or items they aren't choosing at all.

WHAT EDUCATORS SAY

"Perception is reality, and my reality is now the perception of my students. ... What can I do to make a difference in my classroom so that I see growth there for me and my students feel like their voice has been heard?"

— *Christine Firth,*
teacher at Saltar's Point Elementary,
Steilacoom (Washington) School District

"We are asking people to be vulnerable. Vulnerability is a huge component of a growth mindset. You don't have it yet, but maybe you will get it. And you will get it if you work hard. I can't say enough about the positivity that I have seen in my teachers who have better job satisfaction because they feel they have better relationships with their students now."

— *Marilyn Boerke,*
director of talent development,
Camas (Washington) School District

TEACHER REFLECTION AND GROWTH

In Washington, there isn't a state requirement or mandate to connect or collect student perception data related to a teacher's evaluation. Therefore, the exploratory project work focused on using student perception data for

teacher reflection and growth. The power is using this as a tool for deeper reflection that pivots a teacher toward making changes in practice.

Through the Student Perception Project, we have learned that surveys are most useful in a cycle: From survey administration to data analysis to reflection to action and then back to survey administration, ultimately resulting in growth. For full impact, neither teachers nor students can see the survey as a one-time event. The steps of reflection and action are the most critical — and possibly the most difficult.

Collaborative conversations with colleagues, learning teams, professional learning communities, or instructional coaches can be helpful for facilitating reflection and action. Learning teams may decide to administer a survey on a specific aspect of professional growth on which the group is focusing or an individual might ask the team to support her or him in processing what emerged from the surveys. This kind of support can be helpful for engaging in a new and often difficult form of reflection.

In Washington, the results of surveys are not automatically shared with administrators or evaluators unless the teacher decides to share them. But the majority of teachers who do share some aspect of the results or reflection about the results with evaluators have said that it has helped develop relevant professional growth goals that lead to far more meaningful, growth-focused evaluation conversations.

ENGAGING STUDENTS

For this process to work, students need to be prepared to understand how to look at what is happening in the classroom with a critical eye and provide constructive feedback. The teacher must be prepared to explain the reason for the surveys and coach students through the art of providing constructive feedback for learning, a skill that is critical for a lifelong learner mindset. When teachers take these steps, students often feel honored to

LEARN MORE

- The Student Perception Survey Toolkit is available at cstp-wa.org/teacher-leadership/resources/student-perception-project.
- Teachers, administrators, and students share their perspectives about the impact of student feedback data in this video on the Student Perception Project: www.youtube.com/watch?v=o2sEjiP41eU&feature=youtu.be.



be active participants in someone else's learning, especially that of their teacher.

Students also need to know their feedback is being taken seriously. After teachers review the results, they should discuss them with students. This can open meaningful two-way communication between teachers and students and may help teachers clarify students' points of view. In addition, this can demonstrate to students a teacher's growth mindset and create stronger partnerships with students as initiators of their own learning and growth.

As we involve students, we elevate student voice and ownership increases. Students begin to understand that they have agency and are valuable collaborators in the learning experience, which often results in increased connections and deeper relationships.

SUPPORTING TEACHERS

It's important to recognize that student perception data are often not easy for teachers to see and use. Listening to students situates teachers in a vulnerable space that most are not accustomed to. Often what is communicated in the results can be surprising, challenge assumptions, or lead to new ideas or more questions.

We have learned that translating student perception data into teacher

growth isn't necessarily a natural move, especially when the learning is deeply personal and teachers may not want to share their student perception data.

One way to shift teachers out of this discomfort and resistance is to focus on cultivating a mindset shift away from assessing whether teaching is "good" or "bad" to whether it is effective for these specific students.

With a microgrant from the Learn Next initiative, spearheaded by education design lab 2Revolutions, the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession convened a group of educators who had experience with the student perception surveys to develop a tool kit for their colleagues to support teachers before, during, and after the survey process.

The Student Perception Survey Toolkit includes tools and resources to create a climate of emotional safety and orientation to action for teachers as they seek and respond to student perception data and honor student voice. It focuses on reflection, offers advice about conversations, and provides resources on learner agency.

POWERFUL LEARNING

Authentic student perceptions provide educators with feedback to dig deeper into what is happening from the student experience and how they are learning, whether we agree or not. The critical next action step is for the teacher to decide how to use that data to impact the student experience.

There are several ways teachers are using the feedback from the surveys. One is to inform professional learning. We have seen teachers use the data to set more relevant professional goals for themselves. To maximize this potential, we have moved to regularly incorporating a collaborative processing of their results with colleagues and evaluators.

Teachers also use the data to modify daily classroom practices. For example, some teachers, realizing they need to do more to assess and summarize student learning each day to ensure all students

understand, have posted clearer lesson objectives or developed exit tickets.

Other teachers have reported that their data have generated deeper class discussions about topics such as rigor, lack of challenging material, and how to address instructional issues with their teacher.

In one instance, the result was implementation of an inquiry-focused time giving students autonomy and creativity over their own learning and

space to explore new ideas, passions, and things that spark curiosity.

Overall, one of the most widespread impacts was how teachers and students approached goal setting in a more collaborative way. The survey opens the door for a different type of conversation, but achieving results takes time and investment. By demonstrating how to give and receive feedback, take action, and learn and grow, we are providing an invaluable learning moment for students.

Asking students for feedback shows them that teachers are learners, too, and it can become a way of being that is transformative for everyone.

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Students as education partners

Continued from p. 23

before the committee. The result was the School Safety and Resiliency Act, which passed its final reading after adopting an amendment that was a behind-the-scenes nod to our work: a stipulation that students are represented as required school safety plans are developed.

Additional, powerful examples of young people shaping important public conversations in Kentucky include:

- A group of our members at one high school concerned about the rollout of metal detectors and security officers there surveyed 600 peers to ascertain the impact of the new measures. The results showed that, while a majority felt that the measures made them physically safer, a distinct minority said they prompted new fears and created a prison-like atmosphere. The team then shared the data with teachers and administrators to prompt a larger discussion about the need to focus on more alienated students.
- After leading a study to measure the extent of sexual harassment in high school, a member of our team formed a nonprofit dedicated to sexual harassment education. The results were picked up by the local and national press, and she is now

developing materials to train students to address the problem in their schools.

- Other members of our team conducted a study about mental health stigmatization in schools and founded a nonprofit dedicated to mobilizing students to educate peers on a range of mental health issues. The group works with mental health professionals and hosts an annual summit for students from throughout the state.
- And yet another member affiliated with our team is embarking on a second year of coordinating a statewide, bipartisan campaign to ban corporal punishment in the 17 Kentucky school districts that still practice it.

Our team members also serve as informed spokespeople for scores of news media covering school safety, and we have published several op-eds in all of the state's major newspapers.

LEARNING TOGETHER

In just a few short years, between attending classes, taking tests, doing homework, and everything else being full-time students entails, our team has had an outsized impact beyond the classroom. Between them, members have generated 60 op-eds, led 165 local

and national presentations, produced three policy reports, organized three statewide capitol rallies, created a blog and a podcast, and even published a book.

Our entire process is a shift in power. It positions educators and students to not only learn together from gathering and interpreting data but also collaborate to enact and assess solutions. We ask educators to remember that students are capable of much more than planning dances and bake sales. Rather than asking for student opinions after decisions have been made, we implore educators to consult students from the beginning.

We know it's easier said than done, but it can be done. Enlisting students as education improvement partners at the school, district, and state levels engages students in the civic life of schools and communities. It demonstrates what it can look like when we support students to do democracy in addition to studying it.

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Chris Godfrey, 7th-grade math teacher and teacher leader, talks with students Meriem Gouitit and Sabirah Simon at Putnam Avenue Upper School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Student identity and voice are woven into instruction throughout the school.

LEARNING IS A TWO-WAY STREET

MIDDLE SCHOOL STRENGTHENS TEACHING
BY FOCUSING ON STUDENT IDENTITY

BY SUZANNE BOUFFARD AND LIZ MURRAY

“School is not a rehearsal for life. School *is* life,” says Mirko Chardin, founding principal of Putnam Avenue Upper School, a public middle school serving a diverse group of 6th-8th graders in Cambridge, Massachusetts. When the school was founded in 2012 as part of a districtwide middle school reorganization, its leaders and staff were determined to focus on the student experience and put student voice at the heart of their work.

“People often talk about putting kids at the center, but no one talks about how,” Chardin says. “Kids can’t be at the center if the adults don’t have the capacity to understand their perspectives.”

For Chardin and his colleagues, this means more than simply asking students what they think — although that is part of their approach. Student identity and voice are woven into instruction throughout the school, with leaders and staff constantly asking themselves how they can learn from

students about their experiences and how to use that insight to continually refine educator practice.

At the school, which serves the highest-needs population in the district — 45% of students are classified as economically disadvantaged, 29% of students have diagnosed disabilities, and 24% speak a first language other than English (Cambridge Public Schools, n.d.a) — the adults work within a framework called Going Beyond Access, which embeds identity, relevance, and cultural responsiveness into the school experience.

Chardin says the talk in education circles about equity and access to high-quality learning materials and opportunities can be powerful, but not enough. Students, he says, need authentic, relevant, and meaningful learning opportunities.

He explains by way of a medical analogy, saying that even if all patients had access to customized pharmaceuticals, “if there was no treatment plan, no understanding of patient history or allergies, that access wouldn’t be the leveraging agent that helped make people well.”

Chardin talks openly about his own struggles in secondary school as a young man of color. The lack of connectedness and relevance contributed to a cycle of disengagement, disciplinary action, and expulsions that nearly kept him from a high school diploma. He is passionate about making sure he provides his students with different school experiences.

That kind of passion — for academic excellence, social justice, and applying knowledge to improving one’s



Maryam Barry shares her story of self with principal Mirko Chardin.

self and the world — is one of the five core values of the school. The other four are pride, ownership, balance, and perseverance (Cambridge Public Schools, n.d.b).

Established by the school’s founding faculty and students, the values resonated because they were authentic and not educational jargon, according to staff. At the heart of all of them is a sense of visibility and identity.

BEYOND ACCESS

The Going Beyond Access framework, which Chardin developed based on research and scholarship, is anchored in three core concepts.

The first, derived from the work of Beverly Daniel Tatum, is valuing impact over intentions. While students and staff recognize the importance of operating with positive intent, they also push themselves to consider whether the steps they take are having a real impact for students and

the community, and that requires listening to and making sense of kids’ experiences.

The second, building on the work of Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, is ensuring that students can see themselves reflected in the work. That includes learning from faculty who share their backgrounds, seeing images of people who look like them on the walls, doing readings and assignments that reflect their culture and interests, and having frequent opportunities to tell their stories. Students report that it also includes staff routinely seeking student input and revising learning opportunities accordingly.

The third piece, drawn from the work of Christopher Emdin, is ensuring that learning tasks are authentically relevant for each group of students. The team works to check its own assumptions about what resonates with students and learn from the students themselves.

“What is relevant for a group of young people in June 2019 is not necessarily going to resonate for a group in September 2019,” Chardin says. The only way to avoid incorrect assumptions is to listen. When educators don’t do that, he says, their efforts to connect with students fall flat.

EDUCATOR LEARNING

To ensure that identity, relevance, and cultural responsiveness are embedded schoolwide, they are emphasized in professional learning for leaders and staff. In addition to regular professional learning and collaboration structures that occur several times per week, staff choose focus areas for six staff intensives per year because, as Chardin says, an assembly or occasional reading doesn’t suffice “if we are going to embrace social justice ... [and] lift up identity.”

That means committing to authentic learning opportunities that model the kind of learning experiences adults want to create for young people. After all, Chardin asks, “How can an adult who has never been at the center of their own learning experience create rich learning experiences for kids?”

The school’s professional learning is grounded in the following key strategies:

A parallel path for adult learners and student learners. When the team embarks on a new initiative for improving its work with students, team members practice and experience the new learning tasks together so that they understand and empathize with the student experience and can revise accordingly before implementing. As Chris Godfrey, a 7th-grade math teacher, explained, until you do the assignment yourself, “you don’t know what you don’t know.”

For example, last summer, Christina Farese, the school’s director of teaching, learning, and coaching, led math team members through an activity on examining their mathematical thinking and exploring their math identities before they implemented

WHAT STUDENT VOICE MEANS TO ME

Here’s what Putnam Avenue Upper School students say student voice means to them:

Nuraya Toledo, 8th grade: “[It means] that our opinions matter. Certain things we do, they ask our opinion on it. It’s more helpful for us than them just handing to us and we just sit there.”

Abby Duncan, 8th grade: “For me, it’s seeing teachers going out of their way to give us students what we need to better ourselves in that subject. ... Seeing us doesn’t necessarily mean only hearing our voices, but observing us and seeing us through our actions as well.”

Sammy Nkemnik, 8th grade: “I think it’s the ability to ... go up to a teacher and tell them what you don’t like about the class and then have them change it so it’s a better learning environment for you.”

Adam Ouassaidi, 7th grade: “It can help the teachers improve what they’re teaching, because if you tell them ... what they need to work on or how it will help you with learning, then they can change it up and make it better for the students as well as the teachers, which is pretty much the goal.”

HOW WE ELICIT STUDENT VOICE

Putnam Avenue Upper School staff describe how they elicit student voice:

Chris Godfrey, 7th-grade math teacher and teacher leader: “We start the year with a lot of team building and just getting to know our students, and that sets the foundation for the work we’re trying to accomplish. There’s a quote that always stands out in my brain that goes something to the effect that, ‘You have to earn the right to redirect someone.’ There are a lot of individuals in education who are really well-meaning, but they miss that piece of building that relationship to be able to deliver the content.”

Kareem Cutler, 6th-grade math teacher and teacher leader: “We do verbal and written surveys to learn about students’ experiences. We do an activity called number talks [an instructional strategy aimed at engaging all voices in the math classroom and empowering all students to discuss and feel empowered by their mathematical thinking].”

Michelle Calioro, math coach and founding teacher leader: “We did math identity projects as a team over the summer, and then teachers did them with their students [to explore feelings about math and beliefs about self related to math]. A lot of my students don’t see themselves as mathematicians, but in this project ... they start to open themselves up and see [being a mathematician] is a lot more than they would have normally seen.”

a revised version of the activity with students (see sidebar above). The adults make this learning transparent to the students.

This commitment to modeling extends to structuring staff meetings and professional learning the way

teachers are expected to structure classes. “We need to look at our meetings as lessons and our agendas as lesson plans,” Chardin says. The same applies to common planning time, staff intensives, and other forms of professional learning.

Starting small. When starting new initiatives, the school's leaders believe that less is more and that it's important not to rush to scale. Michelle Calioro, a founding teacher, explains that this gives people a chance to be vulnerable. "To really give kids voice and choice, you have to give up some teacher control, and that can be scary," she says. "... [Starting with pilots] gives people opportunities to take a little risk. It shows that we're going to do it together, and then we'll see what happens and we'll grow from there."

For example, school leaders used small pilot projects to begin using Universal Design for Learning, an instructional framework that helps educators make learning accessible to all through recognizing learners' variability and providing flexibility.

They worked with volunteers to experiment and grapple with it over a three-year period. Those volunteers gradually became teacher experts who helped lead a full rollout. Universal Design for Learning is now applied schoolwide, and staff are working to make cultural responsiveness an explicit part of the framework.

Collaborative learning. Teachers and staff do not learn or work in isolation. Among many structures for professional learning are common planning times three times a week, during which teachers engage in grade-level planning, delving into student work, data, and student support. Sometimes they will examine a video or text and discuss its implications for their instruction.

Chardin says this kind of collaborative learning is especially important for cultural proficiency because it ensures that adults are developing relationships and learning from colleagues who are different from them.

Commitment to action. Chardin says he and his staff have made a commitment to "being doers." That means constantly asking themselves, "Do we actually believe what we say we believe?," following through on

their commitments, and ensuring that everything they do — even what they hang on the walls — has a purpose. That applies to how adults work with each other as well as with students.

PUTTING TOGETHER THE PIECES

One example of how leaders and staff put all these pieces together can be seen in the school's annual Story of Self project, which builds on work by sociologist Marshall Ganz. Each fall, students spend several weeks crafting a personal narrative about a challenge they have faced, a choice they made in navigating it, and the outcome of that process.

Their stories are shared with their peers, school staff, and the wider community during a special event in December. The goal is to illustrate how this experience shaped or demonstrates a key value the student holds while promoting writing and presentation skills.

The focus of the project is on students, but it doesn't start with students. First, staff write their own stories and share them with one another. Then they share them with students to model vulnerability, build trust, and normalize the experience. Chardin says this gives adults a sense of humility and connection as they coach students to craft their narratives.

After students write and share stories of challenge and growth, school staff who lead advisory groups facilitate circles, derived from restorative practices, to help students reflect on their experience. For example, in Fatima Sammy's 8th-grade advisory, students begin by sharing their feelings about the experience, then give other advisory members support, and identify feedback about their own performance to keep them growing and stretching.

This structure works well because the school implements restorative practices regularly. As with many other initiatives, school leaders launched restorative practice with a pilot that focused on whether adults could engage productively in a restorative circle. Over

time, the practice grew and staff learned to facilitate it with students. Now students participate in several circles a week, during advisory period and sometimes during core classes.

Sammy says circles give students space to deal with frustration that arises in the classroom and with peers and teachers so they can move on. Counselors also lead smaller circles with students having conflicts. 8th-grade student Abby Duncan, who finds that circles ease the stress of a hectic week, says that teachers also use them to see if lessons connected with students.

TRUST AND VULNERABILITY

Support for adult learning and growth are at the center of all of this work, which requires trust and vulnerability. "If we want to treat our kids with respect and dignity, we have to treat our adults with respect and dignity," Chardin says. "We've tried to model the idea that our school needs to be an adult learning community in order for it to be a rich learning community for students. And the learning experiences for everyone have to be authentic."

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LEARN TO LISTEN

USE STUDENT INTERVIEWS
TO DRIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING



BY NICORA PLACA

As a mathematics coach and researcher, I sit in on many teacher team meetings across different schools and districts. I see teachers spending a lot of time talking about students: They talk about how students learn, how to best plan lessons for them, and how to understand their written work using different protocols. We know that when these conversations in team meetings and professional learning communities (PLCs) are thoughtful and done well, they drive change in schools (DuFour & Eaker, 2009; Schmoker, 2005).

However, as I listened to the conversations in these meetings, I

started to wonder where the student voice was. Why weren't we spending some of this time listening to what students had to say? Instead of hypothesizing about what a student might do on a task or why a student made a certain mistake, why weren't we just asking the student to tell us?

Research suggests that listening to student thinking is important. For example, research on Cognitively Guided Instruction (CGI) demonstrates that teachers who participate in professional learning focused on student thinking develop greater understanding of children's mathematical strategies, and this impacts their instruction and their students' problem-solving ability

and confidence (Carpenter & Fennema, 1992; Fennema et al., 1996; Franke, Carpenter, Levi, & Fennema, 2001).

Based on these experiences and research, I started to incorporate student interviews in team meetings at strategic points so that teachers could listen to students. Conducting these interviews has had a big impact on the teams' learning that translated to changes in instructional practice.

WHY IS IT SO HARD TO LISTEN?

In classrooms, there is so much going on that we educators often have trouble listening to what students are saying. Before I started using interviews in teams, I would visit classrooms and

hear teachers trying to guide students down a particular path instead of listening to what the students were saying. This happened even more often when a student arrived at an incorrect solution.

For example, a student would write the following on their paper:

$$1/3 + 1/4 = 2/7.$$

This is the conversation that would follow:

Teacher: I see you added the numerators and denominators. Are those the same size pieces?

Student: Yes?

Teacher: Are you SURE those pieces are the same size?

Student: Um. No?

Teacher: Good! So what do we do if they aren't the same size?

Student: Um

Teacher: I'll give you a hint. We worked on it yesterday. We need to find

Student: The same size?

Teacher: Yes. We need to find common ...

Student: Ummmmm ... denominators?

Teacher: Yes. Very good! We need to find common denominators. Why don't you review the notes from yesterday or look at the anchor chart on how to find the common denominator and then redo this?

The problem with this approach is that the teacher has not learned anything about what the student is thinking. She leads the student through

the process again, but the student hasn't learned why the solution works, so he will likely make the same mistake again on a subsequent problem.

Why do so many of us engage in this kind of leading conversation and make the missteps described in the sidebar? Why is it so hard for us to stop and listen to students? Often, it's because there is so much to attend to in a classroom.

We feel such an urgency to help our students get to the correct answer as quickly as possible that we often skip over the important step of listening to them. I was guilty of this when I first started teaching. But we can and should do more for our students.

HOW DO WE DEVELOP LISTENING SKILLS?

Using student interviews in team meetings can be powerful in developing our listening skills and our ability to understand student thinking. I have used these interviews with students of all ages, starting with kindergarten and going up through high school.

The teacher teams I work with will ask students to come into team meetings, explain the purpose and attempt to put them at ease, and ask them to think aloud as they work on a carefully selected task. A team member asks probing questions designed to help us understand the student's mathematical thinking as the rest of the group listens and takes notes.

We often bring in a number of

COMMON MISTAKES

Here are common mistakes that keep educators from listening to students:

- Listening only for the right answer.
- Listening only for a particular solution path.
- Thinking about the next instructional move instead of listening to the student.
- Assuming that students are thinking the same way we are thinking.
- Not listening for what students know.
- Not listening for the informal knowledge students bring to the problem.
- Not trying to make sense of what students are doing.

students to work on the same task so that we can compare and contrast different responses. After the students leave, we analyze the interviews and develop next steps for planning and instruction.

The goal of these interviews is to gather as much information as possible about how a student is thinking. They are not designed to be teaching sessions. They require flexible questioning to

determine what the student is thinking that is producing the behavior.

In my experience, team members develop both questioning and listening skills through these interviews, and these skills translate directly to the classroom.

HOW CAN YOU USE INTERVIEWS WITH YOUR TEAMS?

When you begin using student interviews, these three steps are helpful.

1. Select a task.

The first step is to select the mathematical task you want students to work on. The task you choose should depend on your goals.

For example, you may want to use interviews before starting a new topic to assess what students already know about it and what intuitions they have about it. A middle school team I worked with was about to start a unit on positive and negative integers, so we gave students an integer operation task related to temperature. Many team members were surprised to find that students brought many informal understandings about how to find the difference between two temperatures by using a number line, even though they hadn't been taught formally about integer operations.

This knowledge changed how they approached the start of the unit. They began with contexts that involved temperature and used a vertical number line to help students reason about negative numbers.

You might want to use interviews when you notice students are struggling on a particular assessment item. If you have examined the student work but still have questions, interviews are a great way to gather more data about what's going wrong.

For example, when over 70% of 2nd graders in one class answered a test question incorrectly, we asked some students to think aloud with the teaching team about the word problem. Many students shared they were using a keyword strategy — that is, they circled numbers and underlined certain words, such as all or each, and performed

HELPFUL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND PROMPTS

- How do you know?
- How did you figure that out?
- Why did you ... (e.g. write that, draw that)? How did that help you?
- I noticed that you stopped what you were doing just now/crossed something out. What were you thinking there?
- Why did you change your mind/answer?
- I don't know what you mean by that. Will you show me with a picture/with the manipulatives in front of you?
- Can you tell me what _____ means?

COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS TO AVOID

- That's right!
- Good job!
- What if you ...?
- You know that if you just ...
- Remember what we did in class last week ...
- Oh, I see what you did. You ...
- Do you mean ...?

operations they were told related to those words.

We recognized that using this strategy kept them from reading the problem fully. They were circling numbers and words and choosing an operation without truly understanding the question. This led the team to an interesting discussion about the flaws of teaching students with a keyword strategy as opposed to helping them make sense of the problem.

2. Conduct the interview.

Setting expectations with students and making them feel comfortable are

important. This includes:

- Explain the purpose to students.
- Ask students to think aloud.
- Explain that when you ask questions it doesn't mean they are wrong.
- Ask probing questions.
- Avoid leading questions.
- Avoid making assumptions that the student is thinking the way you are.

Remember that it can be intimidating for students to walk into a room full of teachers. It's important to explain that they are there to help you understand more about how students think about math. Ask them if they can share what they are thinking as they work and think aloud while they solve the problem.

Be clear that it is not a test and that the team is going to ask a lot of questions. Many students have learned the norm in school is that if a teacher asks you why you did something, you should change your answer, so make sure they know you're asking questions for other reasons.

The types of questions you ask are important. The key is to ask questions that uncover the student thinking. Avoid leading students to a particular line of reasoning or using the interview to try to teach them or correct a misconception. See the sidebar at left for question stems and prompts that can be helpful as well as questions and prompts that you want to avoid.

As you or one of the team members conducts the interview, the rest of the group should be listening carefully. The following questions can guide what they are listening and looking for:

- What representations, visuals, or manipulatives does the student use to facilitate his or her thinking?
- What kind of reasoning does the student use?
- In what way(s) do the student's explanations make sense?
- What misconceptions do you notice the student has about the problem?

- What informal knowledge or intuition does the student bring to the problem?

It can be helpful to take notes during the interview or videotape the interview so that the team can review it if needed. It's also helpful to collect the student work at the end for reviewing and discussing later.

3. Debrief.

After several student interviews, the team debriefs. During the discussion, we try to make sense of the students' strategies. We focus on what the student understands and then move to what their misconceptions might be.

The assumption we make throughout the discussion is that what the student did makes sense to them even if it doesn't make sense to us. Our goal is to figure out why they solved the problem the way they did and what the implications are for our next steps.

The following questions are useful in facilitating the analysis:

- What did the student understand?
- What did the student struggle with?
- What would be some next steps for the student?
- What would be some next steps for our instruction?

Sometimes next steps include modifications to unit or lesson plans, or designing specific re-engagement lessons to address misconceptions. It is also helpful to document and share what you learn so that other teacher teams can have access to the findings.

IMPACT ON INSTRUCTION

In my experience, including student interviews in team meetings impacts professional learning in a variety of ways.

It improves the team's mastery of the math content they are teaching and often introduces them to new strategies students developed. It allows the team to take an asset-based view of the students as they are looking at what they bring to a problem as opposed

to only looking at what they don't understand.

In addition, it brings a different mood to team meetings. The interviews create a culture of curiosity about student thinking. And when a student comes into a team meeting, the energy can shift and the team can focus on the student in front of them.

Finally, conducting these interviews can have an impact on how the team listens to students in their classrooms.

Let's go back to the example from the beginning and see how the student-teacher conversation can work differently and how both parties can benefit from it.

Student work: $1/3 + 1/4 = 2/7$.

Teacher: Can you tell me how you got your answer?

Student: Is it wrong?

Teacher: I don't know. Why don't you explain it to me and we will try to figure it out.

Student: Well, here you have one out of three things (pointing to one-third) and here you are adding one out of four things (pointing to one-fourth). So basically you now have two out of seven things.

Teacher: Interesting. Can you try using these fraction strips (or number line or fraction circles) to show me another way to solve the problem?

Student: OK. Let me take the one-third fraction strip and the one-fourth fraction strip and put them together to show one-third plus one-fourth.

Teacher: Thanks. You said the answer was two-sevenths. Can you show me two-sevenths with the strips?

Student: Sure. (Student makes two-sevenths.) Oh, wait. They aren't the same size. Two-sevenths is much smaller than the one-fourth and one-third together. Something is wrong. I think I need to change the strips so they are the same size. Maybe I could multiply the denominators and make them twelfths. Let me try.

When we shift to listening to what students say, we are able to help make sense of their thinking and respond to their needs in the moment. This in turn can help us develop interventions to push their thinking and understanding, not just get them to the right answer on a single problem.

Using student interviews in team meetings can be a useful tool in helping teams develop these skills so that everyone develops deeper understanding.

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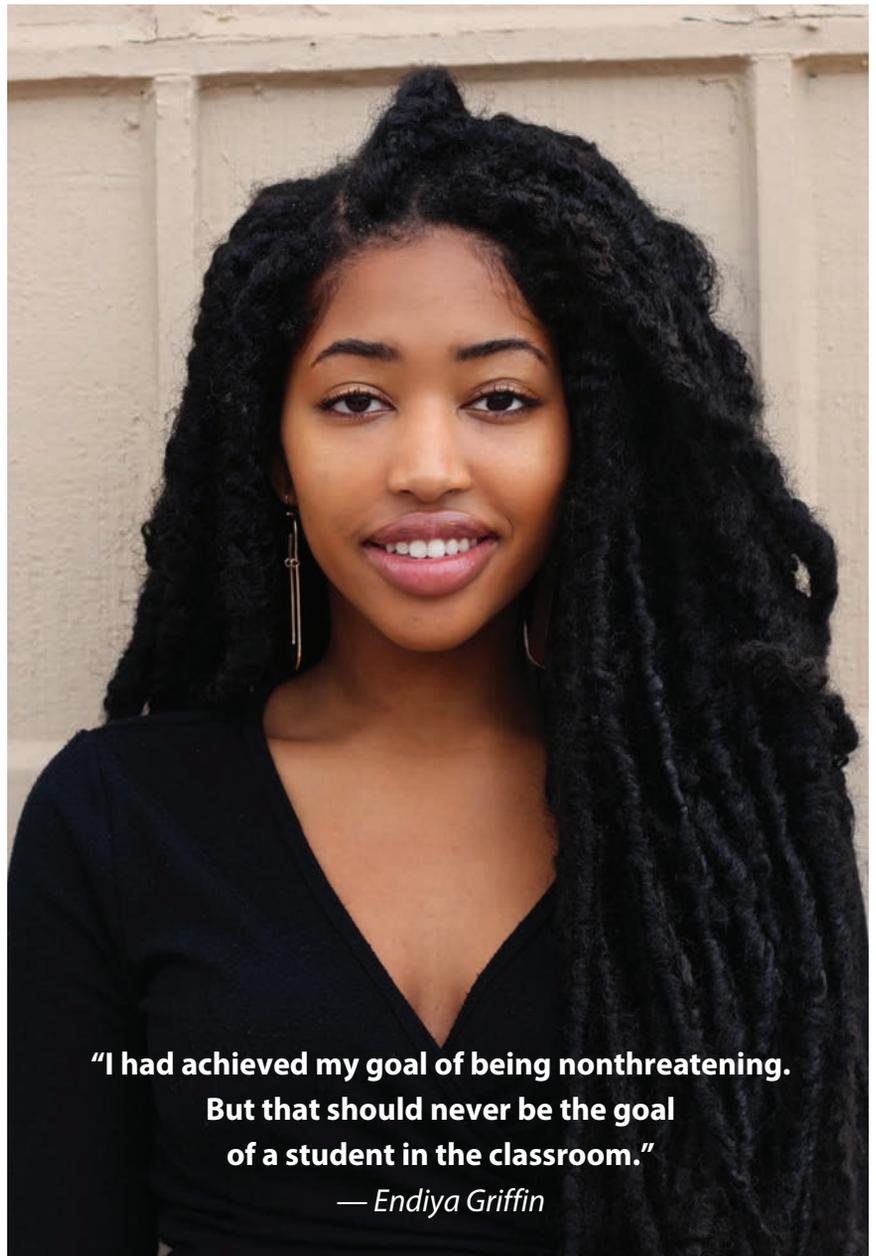
SEE ME FOR WHO I AM

TO BEST SERVE STUDENTS,
EQUIP TEACHERS WITH
CULTURAL COMPETENCY

BY ENDIYA GRIFFIN

On the first day of 1st grade, I walked into class to discover that mine was the only black face in the room. We began the day by introducing ourselves and showing off the self-portraits that we'd made over the summer.

I rose cautiously to present my Crayola-colored masterpiece, but before I could even say my name, a boy in my class asked me why my portrait was



**"I had achieved my goal of being nonthreatening.
But that should never be the goal
of a student in the classroom."**

— Endiya Griffin

Photo by CHRISTINA CHOMUT

brown, saying that brown was ugly. I froze. My face grew red, and tears began to fill my eyes.

However, what was most painfully disappointing at that moment was not what was said, but what wasn't. My teacher stood there just as silently as me, then beckoned me to continue. She never addressed the boy or his awful words.

Unfortunately, my experience was not unique. Experiences like these

characterize the education careers of so many students of color. The prevalence of these encounters exposes a lack of cultural competence in schools.

Many organizations, such as the National Education Association (NEA, n.d.), have written policy briefs explaining the need for cultural competence within a diverse cultural climate. But cultural competence is not the norm.

In the field of health care, cultural

incompetence has long been recognized as an issue (Graves, Like, Kelly, & Hohensee, 2007), and legislation is being written to intervene. We need to do the same with education.

To best serve students, we must urge districts to require that all faculty engage in extensive cultural competency training. No student deserves to endure a teacher who remains silent in the face of oppression.

SYSTEMIC INEQUALITY

According to a recent study that analyzed the changes in our education landscape over the past 65 years, schools have become more segregated at the expense of public education (Orfield, Frankenberg, Ee, & Ayscue, 2019). Schools often closely resemble the neighborhoods in which they are located, so, due to redlining, black and Latinx students are more likely than their white counterparts to attend impoverished schools that serve majority students of color.

These schools often do not have the resources to adequately equip students to escape cyclical poverty. Their children end up going to the school where they will likely have the same exact experience — the cycle continues. This type of pattern takes place all over the country and reinforces racial and socioeconomic inequalities (Chang, 2018).

The flip side of this pattern is a phenomenon referred to as “isolation” (Reardon & Owens, 2014). Isolation is a way to measure school segregation by looking at students who attend schools with a low proportion of a given racial group. Because the majority of white

WHAT IS ‘CODE-SWITCHING’?

Watch Endiya Griffin, at right, and Tatiana Howell discuss the value of code-switching, the practice of alternating between two or more languages or varieties of language in conversation. www.youtube.com/watch?v=JtINpW1j-m4



students attend schools that are at least 75% white, it is far more common for a student of color to be one of the only students of his or her race than it is for a white student (McFarland et al., 2017).

At the same time, teachers of color are overwhelmingly outnumbered by their white colleagues, accounting for only 20% of educators in public K-12 education (Geiger, 2018). This means that most white students will be taught by teachers who look like them for their entire education careers whereas students of color (and especially male students of color) will be lucky if they get a handful of teachers who look like them.

The white dominance of education in our ever-diversifying society often means that educators are not trained in cultural competence — and for kids with stories like mine, that can mean suppressing pieces of our cultural identities just to fit in at school (Griffin & Howell, 2019).

Up until the 9th grade, I attended schools that were predominantly white and employed predominantly white

faculty. As a black girl, that meant being stared at mercilessly by students and teachers alike as we discussed subjects like slavery, being petted like an animal anytime I came to school with a new hairstyle, and constantly getting in trouble for being “too sassy.” My behavior cards seemed to change from green to yellow on a near-daily basis.

My battles, however, were minor compared with those of the few black boys in my class, whose cards seemed to be permanently set on red. As with many black boys around the country (GAO, 2018), minor infractions often led to yelling and frequent visits to the principal rather than genuine attempts to understand the alleged issue and its roots. I quickly internalized the trauma of watching them be so rampantly criminalized and began to self-police.

I was determined to be the nonthreatening black girl. No poofy hairstyles, no hands on my hips, no talking back — nothing that would make my teachers treat me the way they

treated my black male peers. I began to code-switch without even recognizing it, leaving my blackness at the door whenever I stepped onto my school’s campus and replacing it with “whiter” things such as straight A’s and “proper” diction.

I was rewarded for these acts of assimilation with things like honor roll and selection for class activities. I had achieved my goal of being nonthreatening. But that should never be the goal of a student in the classroom.

CULTURALLY COMPETENT CLASSROOMS

Students of color should not be tasked with mitigating the underlying biases of their teachers. For teachers to do their job effectively, these biases must be eradicated before they even enter the classroom.

Here are my four recommendations to educators for creating culturally competent, identity-supporting, and inclusive classrooms.

1. Acknowledge and check your biases.

Recognizing that our biases exist is the first step in eradicating them. Implicit biases are ubiquitous and often result from cultural conditioning, media portrayals, and personal upbringing. But it’s not enough to know they exist. We have to learn where our biases lay and actively work to unlearn them by replacing false narratives with truth.

2. Question problematic behavior.

Whether it is private conversation among colleagues or classroom chatter, it is important to question behavior that demeans, disrespects, or threatens students of color to preserve the integrity and safety of education spaces. As my 11th-grade advisor frequently said, “What you allow, you encourage.” When you witness the propagation of discrimination and miseducation, it is important to intervene.

Through open conversation about bias, you can encourage new

perspectives and enrich discourse by researching the roots of those biases.

3. Support self-expression.

Hold space for students to express themselves and their identities to create a classroom culture where students and teachers learn as a community. While “diverse” students should not be exploited for their unique experiences (i.e. always expecting them to share when topics related to their identities arise), creating opportunities for students to voluntarily offer anecdotes and insight or even simply be themselves in the classroom can dismantle implicit bias by creating empathy and communal understanding.

4. Hire faculty with diverse identities.

The low percentage of teachers of color in schools today is unacceptable, especially considering that, as society progresses, we are becoming more and more diverse. Not only must education administration consider ethnic diversity in its hiring patterns, but also diversity in terms of age, religion, sexual identity, socioeconomic status, ability, and gender identity.

When educators reflect the variety of the world that we live in, they can better equip students to thrive by fostering creativity, promoting empathy, reducing prejudice, and improving student achievement.

As I reflect on my 1st-grade experience, I believe that, had each of these suggestions been implemented adequately at my school and throughout the system, my teacher would have had the confidence to rise up against my classmate’s misinformed and microaggressive comments and create a culturally competent learning environment where I felt seen as a student — and, more importantly, as a person.

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Endiya Griffin (griffin.endiya@gmail.com) is a high school senior, youth storyteller, and social justice advocate in San Diego, California. ■

Student journalists from the Canine Courier at El Dorado Springs (Missouri) High School shared their thoughts and suggestions about what teachers need to know so that all students feel safe, welcome, and successful. Journalism teacher Amber Francis and assistant superintendent Theresa Christian facilitated their contributions.

WHAT I WISH MY TEACHER KNEW



"I hope teachers understand that our experience in their classes affects us for our whole lives," says 9th grader Kaleigh Biby, 15.

REACH OUT TO STRUGGLING STUDENTS

BY KALEIGH BIBY

Have you ever noticed how easily some students grasp information regardless of how they are taught? But what about the rest of us? Every student learns differently, and the same teaching strategies don't always work for everyone. If a student does not grasp the information the first time they're taught, it makes the student feel frustrated. He or she may start

to dread the class and eventually the subject in general.

I wish teachers knew how much students struggle, often silently, when teaching strategies are ineffective, dusty, overused, or boring. I know your job is not to entertain me, but if you could use multiple teaching strategies, you'll catch more attention. If teachers also took time to build relationships with their students and recognize how each student learns, the

learning environment would be better.

I remember one class that relied almost exclusively on our comprehension of the textbook. After reading each chapter, we were given a study guide to complete and memorize, and the expectation was that you regurgitate the information back on the test. I struggled severely, always rushing the night before to

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SPEAK UP TO SHUT DOWN BULLYING

BY TARYN DIPMAN

“Yeah, like people with Tourette’s!” the boy in my first-hour class retorts to a crude joke from his friend. The class erupts in laughter as he mimics repetitive arm flailing. As what feels like the entire class laughs and mocks, I stay in the back of the class, quiet. I’m not sure if these kids know that I have Tourette’s. They aren’t intentionally hurting me, but their words still scrape against the insecurities that accompany my disease. I’m sitting there, hoping that the teacher will say something to them. “Shut them down! Make them stop!” I poke at the teacher telepathically. She’s just like me, though: She stays quiet.

Now I’m sitting in my third-hour class, and two boys are whispering during quiet working time. I’m trying to focus on my work, but I can hear them making fun of LGBTQ people. Once again, I’m silently pleading for a teacher to step in. My spirits rise as the teacher notices the conversation. He looks at the boys and says, “We’re not talking about things like that. Let’s keep the conversation school appropriate. You two can talk about it after school.”

Situations just like these are taking place dozens of times, every single day, in every single school. When kids make jokes like this in the classroom, they often don’t realize that there could be someone in the room it hurts. Bullying is often unintentional, taking the form of racist, sexist, homophobic, and ableist jokes and comments. Adults often push for students to stop bullying by speaking up, but students stay silent for many reasons, sometimes to avoid



“Teachers, you have a powerful voice,” says 11th grader Taryn Dipman, 17.

conflict or cover their identification with a group. And many times, attempting to reprimand peers does us more damage than good.

As a student, I wish that teachers knew how impactful their voice and influence are in the fight against bullying in our school system. Many teachers are staying silent, or they make weak attempts, like when they shush the kids and say things like, “Let’s not say that,” then go back to their work. When this happens, bullies continue to make rude statements targeting certain groups because they realize that they have little punishment coming to them.

If teachers would stand up and have a conversation about marginalized students in their classroom, situations like the ones I described would begin

to diminish. All it takes is a few teachers saying, “Those comments are hurtful and unacceptable, and here’s why...” This can be a place of conflict and discomfort, of course, but it’s so important for us students to feel safe.

Teachers, you have a powerful voice. You’ve been chosen to fulfill a career where you shape the lives of today’s youth and the future of our world. If you choose to speak up on behalf of marginalized people and have a conversation with students about bullying, you’re choosing to plant tolerance in this world. If you choose to allow hate in your classroom, you’re allowing hate to take root in the world. Please choose to stand up and stop the seeds of discrimination. ■

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memorize the study guide. It brought loads of stress on me. I can assure you — I learned, remembered, and stored zero knowledge from that course. I can

also assure you that walking into that classroom was a source of major dread for me.

I hope teachers understand that our experience in their classes affects us for

our whole lives because we associate the subject matter with the class. When a student is struggling in your class, get closer with the student, show that you care, and try to fix the problem. ■

LESSONS GO BEYOND THE SUBJECT MATTER

BY KAYLYNNE McCULLICK

Teachers have a lot of impact on our lives, and they don't always know it. They teach us a lot, and not just the subject they're getting paid to teach.

Teachers teach us things we will use in life, not just in school. My math teacher has taught me that there are more important things to worry about than what every single person thinks of me. She taught me that everyone has a different opinion and that not everyone is going to like mine. She taught me that when I am trying to accomplish something, I need to be focusing on that, not on what everyone thinks.

Teachers teach us things that will impact us as people. My English teacher taught me more than just how to write an essay. She taught me that everyone

is unique. She showed me that not everyone I talk to will understand me, and sometimes I won't understand them.

Teachers teach us how to move on from our past. My homeroom teacher has taught me that I'm going to disagree with people, but that opinions can change over time, and that enemies can become friends. He has taught me that people can truly change and become better people.

Teachers teach us things that matter. My journalism teacher has taught me so much more than the curriculum that she was handed. She taught me that I can really make a difference, even through my mistakes. She's taught me that hard work and effort are what separate a good person from a great one.

In the past year, I've learned a lot

more than that the election of 1867 was ended in a compromise. I've learned that I have to work with people I don't always like. I've learned that sometimes I'm wrong, and sometimes the teacher is. One teacher taught me that I'm not always going to like what I'm learning about, so I'll just have to be more attentive in those subjects. Another taught me that I can't be the best at everything and that I have to work harder at some things than others. And all of them have taught me that I am going to change, I'm going to mature and grow as a person. I've learned that no matter what happens, there will always be someone out there cheering me on, hoping for the best for me.

I hope that teachers recognize these lessons are as important as any fact or subject. ■



"Teachers teach us things we will use in life, not just in school," says 9th grader KayLynne McCullick, 15.



9th grader Michelle Nelson, 15, says of 8th-grade math teacher Tonya Hooper: “She has a way of joking around with students and making her students feel like they’re important.”

RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

BY MICHELLE NELSON

When I started the 8th grade, I was terrified. I had always struggled with math, and everyone says that 8th-grade math is so hard! But when class started, it was different from any math class I had ever taken. We took notes almost every day, and almost anytime I was confused, Mrs. Hooper was there to help. As I started to learn and realize that I was good at math, I started loving it. I was finally looking forward to math every day, and it was usually the best hour of my day.

I wish more teachers knew what Mrs. Hooper knows, that they understood the impact of her organized classroom, her welcoming hugs or high fives each day, the way her classroom smelled like Fruity Pebbles, the way she made us take notes every day, and the way she held us accountable for our learning.

One day I decided to thank Mrs. Hooper for all of it, but she brushed off my thank you with the words, “Michelle, I’m just doing my job.” And it hit me, all this time I thought she was going over and above, but she just thought that it was expected. Her comment stuck with me, and I started to wonder, what, exactly, is a teacher’s job? And what makes Mrs. Hooper so great? Does her teaching style make her a better teacher? Am I more open to learning from her because I like her? What if I don’t like a teacher — does that affect my learning? Should it?

I’m not sure I know any of these answers, but I do think I know how Mrs. Hooper built relationships with all of us 8th graders. She has a way of joking around with students and making her students feel like they’re important. She knows our names, our handwriting, and pretty quickly within the year, she knew which lessons might

cause us to struggle. She makes sure that all of her students understand the content and was willing to revisit information that wasn’t quite learned yet.

And still, she held us accountable for our own learning. She instructed us to look at our notes when we had questions, she helped us through problems without giving the answer, and she let us know that she understands we have lives and other things going on outside of her classroom.

I learned more in that 8th-grade math class than I have in any of my other classes. It doesn’t surprise me when Mrs. Hooper’s former students, now in high school, come back to visit. Neither those students nor I will remember everything that she taught us, but we will remember the connection. ■

REACH. INVESTIGATE. DISCOVER.

IDEAS

HOW ARE WE DOING? LET'S CHECK IN

To put it simply, public reflective practice is a check-in: How are we doing, what are we learning from practice, what changes are making a difference, and so on. Teachers have these kinds of conversations privately but rarely have a chance to think out loud with others about what they are coming to understand about teaching and learning. That is a missed opportunity.”

— “*Learning conversations*,”

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IDEAS



LEARNING CONVERSATIONS

TURN REFLECTION INTO A PUBLIC DIALOGUE ON PRACTICE

BY DIANE P. ZIMMERMAN AND WILLIAM A. SOMMERS

Education experts generally agree that reflection on practice is essential for improving teaching. Yet, in our experience, professional learning communities (PLCs) spend little time engaged in reflective practices. In light of the increasing demands on educators for excellence and accountability, reflective practice conversations ought to be front and

center in PLC work — that is, reflective practice needs to become public.

To put it simply, public reflective practice is a check-in: How are we doing, what are we learning from practice, what changes are making a difference, and so on. Teachers have these kinds of conversations privately but rarely have a chance to think out loud with others about what they are coming to understand about

teaching and learning. That is a missed opportunity.

One reason that reflective practices are not made public is that this type of conversation requires a specialized skill set that educators do not always possess. Unlike discussions, which comprise the discourse of most meetings, reflective conversations are a form of dialogue.

Discussions tend to go one of two equally unproductive ways: Participants

talk about how they agree and reinforce each other, or they discuss how they don't agree and either argue or go separate ways. It sometimes becomes a win-lose proposition.

In contrast, a reflective conversation is characterized by the discipline of collective thinking and inquiry, in which participants seek to understand and learn from each other. It is not debate, not argument, and often not even agreement.

Dialogue requires that the conversation slow down and that participants take turns reflecting on what they are coming to understand. When participants take time to think, summarize, and inquire of each other, they learn how others are thinking and acting.

This knowledge becomes cumulative and begins to coalesce into a collective knowledge base. When teachers can collectively describe how they make a difference for learning, they demonstrate collective teacher efficacy and pass on learning legacies to their students and the next generation of teachers.

For this reason, we believe that the essential work of PLCs is learning how to enter into a reflective conversation. To help guide PLCs in this work, we have reviewed existing conversation frameworks and outlined how some of them can help educators collaborate and build knowledge.

When teachers can collectively describe how they make a difference for learning, they demonstrate collective teacher efficacy and pass on learning legacies to their students and the next generation of teachers.

FRAMEWORKS FOR REFLECTION

Over our 40-year careers, we have used many frameworks to create and extend reflective conversations. For our book, *Nine Professional Conversations to Change our Schools: A Dashboard of Options* (Sommers & Zimmerman, 2018), we drew from both business and education thought leaders to describe nine frameworks that have been particularly helpful to us.

While we write about each of these frameworks individually, in our work we have found that once a basic framework is understood, the elements can be mixed and matched to meet team learning needs.

To organize our thinking, we placed each of the conversation frameworks on a continuum, starting with the most open-ended and progressing toward the most directive. This continuum has proven useful for leaders and team members in thinking about how best to

work together to plan for PLC meetings that focus on reflective practice. The figure on p. 46 will help familiarize you with the terms, which are described here.

Reflective conversations

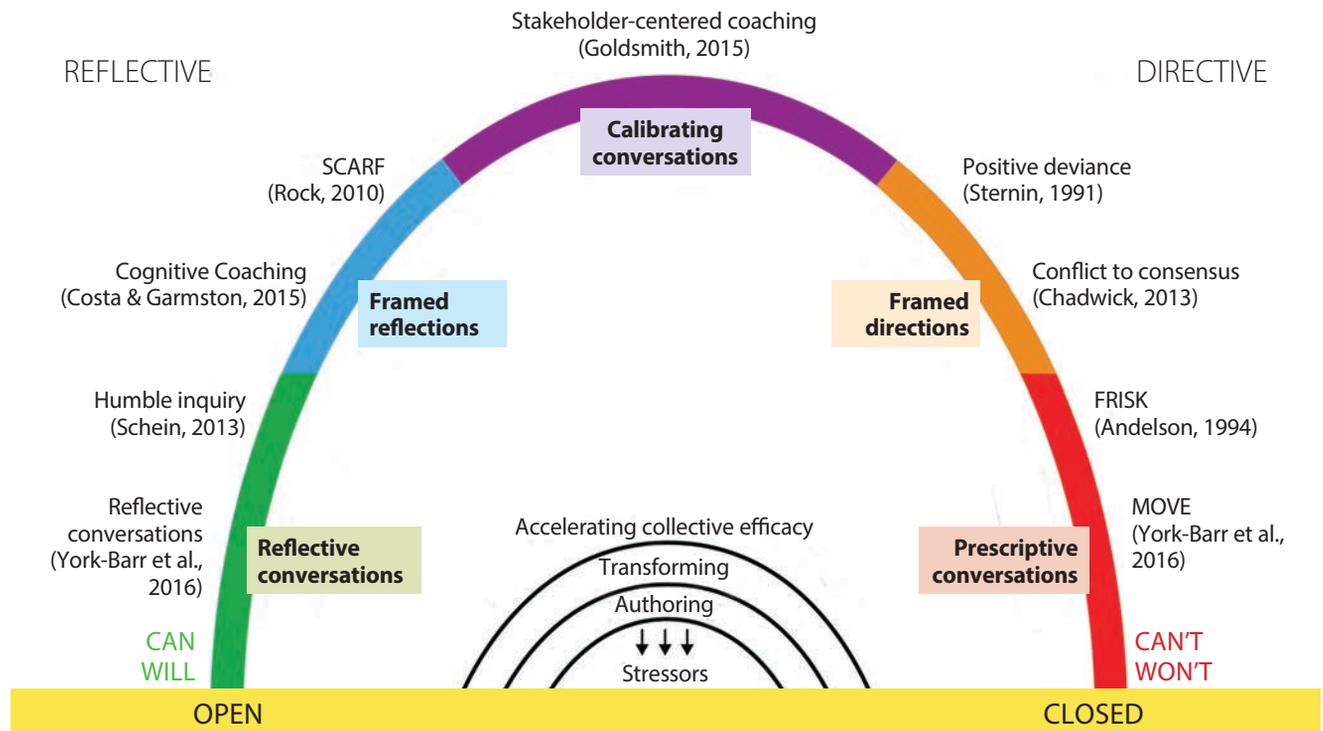
The first two frameworks on the continuum describe reflective conversations in the purest form. Reflective conversations and humble inquiry both use open-ended questions to invite the coachee to talk, explore, examine, and reflect on a professional dilemma.

Edgar Schein, the developer of humble inquiry, found that if he let a person answer the question, "What is going on, and what is the appropriate thing to do?," the client inevitably solved the problem. Over the course of his career, Schein came to understand that what his clients needed was a reflective coach, not a directive consultant.

Framed reflections

These conversations have a bit more structure in that the cognitive coach focuses the inquiry on goals and the resolution of those goals. In the conversation framework, called SCARF, the coach inquires to clarify which of five personal motivations (SCARF is the acronym for these motivations) are driving decision-making. This framework is particularly useful if the

NINE PROFESSIONAL CONVERSATIONS TO CHANGE OUR SCHOOLS



coachee has an emotional overtone to the reflection.

Calibrating conversations

At the top of the arc is stakeholder-centered coaching, developed by Marshall Goldsmith. This type of conversation focuses on data that have been collected from peers, supervisors, and constituents. This data set now frames the conversation. Once the data are understood, the coach then reflects with the coachee about how the data can be used to inform actions.

One of the valuable elements of stakeholder data is that the coachee really cannot argue with the data because they know it represents others' perceptions. But the coachee must be willing to reflect on his or her own behavior related to the data. As coaches, we could provide the data, discuss what they might mean, and even give suggestions, but ultimately the coaching will not be effective if the coachee is not on board.

Indeed, Goldsmith terminates the coaching relationship if the coachee

does not appear to want to work with the data. The key is that even though the conversation has a "directive" quality, ultimately the conversation must become about reflection.

Framed directions

The next set of conversations depends on external data that are collected and then used for reflection either with individuals or a group. In these conversations, stakeholders face brutal facts (e.g. many students are failing math) and then look for and learn from pockets of success (e.g. teachers whose students are not failing).

For example, positive deviance outlines a data collection process that looks for outliers — teachers and students who manage to defy the odds — and examines their practices that could be extrapolated to other classrooms.

Conflict to consensus provides a framework for dealing with conflicts. William Sommers successfully resolved a high-drama conflict between a parent and hockey coaches using this

framework.

After getting the issues on the table, Sommers asked both sides to list their worst possible outcomes. This brought out the first agreement, from both sides, that resignation of the coach would be the worst possible outcome. The group took a break.

On return, Sommers asked each side to list the best possible outcomes. Through this process, both sides agreed to work on effective communication among the coach, the parents, and the players. The end result was that the coach finally understood what had made the parents so angry, and the parents committed to supporting the coach's decisions.

Prescriptive conversations

Finally, the last two conversation types in our continuum are, at their core, prescriptive. Here, the coach describes the problem and prescribes changes. Some educators think this approach is only for administrators, but we have taught it to teacher leaders as a way to deal with dysfunctional

CONVERSATION FRAMEWORKS		
Framework	Purpose	Initiating questions
REFLECTIVE CONVERSATIONS		
Reflective conversations (York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, & Montie, 2016)	Open-ended reflection on professional practice.	What are you thinking about ...?
Humble inquiry (Schein, 2013)	Open-ended reflection on a professional problem.	What is going on ...?
FRAMED REFLECTIONS		
Cognitive Coaching (Costa & Garmston, 2015)	Focus on goal setting, the collection of evidence, and reflection on the learning.	What are you planning? How will you know if it is going as planned? How did it go?
SCARF Status, certainty, autonomy, relationship, fairness (Rock, 2010)	Focus on team motivations for reward or threat.	What is motivating our behaviors?
CALIBRATING CONVERSATIONS		
Stakeholder-centered coaching (Goldsmith, 2015)	Reflect and act on feedback given by stakeholders	What can you learn from the feedback that would inform your work?
FRAMED DIRECTIONS		
Positive deviance (Sternin, 1991)	Find success, study it, and reflect on ways it can be replicated.	What can we learn from others' successes?
Conflict to consensus (Chadwick, 2013)	Parse out conflict by reflecting on worst and best cases.	What is the worst-case scenario? What is the best-case scenario? What can we learn from these?
PRESCRIPTIVE CONVERSATIONS		
FRISK Facts, rules, impact, suggestions, knowledge (Andelson, 1994)	Establish and communicate clear criteria for change.	How can you meet these expectations?
MOVE Move, outplacement, voluntary change, exit (York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, & Montie, 2016)	Create an exit strategy.	What other options do we have before termination?

group behaviors. The key, once again, is that once the data are articulated, then the reflection needs to shift toward how changes can be made either by individuals or a group.

The FRISK (also an acronym for the steps that lead to direct feedback) process can be an effective way to get groups to reflect deeply about a hot issue. Diane Zimmerman used a variation of FRISK to guide a group of teachers into a deep

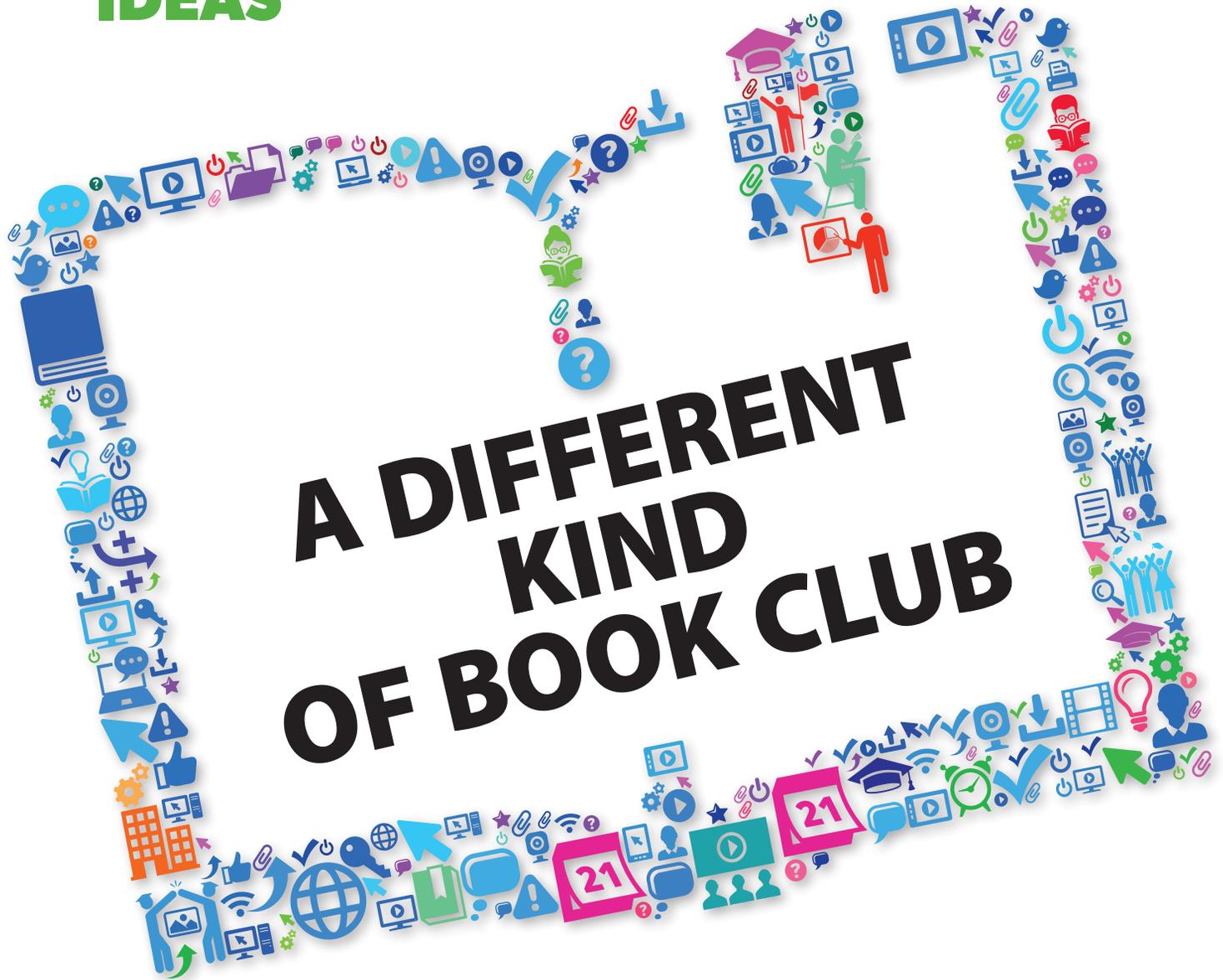
reflection about how appreciations are both given and accepted.

Her initial set-up had followed a simple FRISK formula: (Fact) “The superintendent wants me to nominate a teacher of the year from this school, and several of you have told me this school doesn’t do this. (Rule) The superintendent seems to think I need to ignore past practice (Impact), and this makes me uncomfortable. (Suggestion)

I need to figure out what led to this decision (Knowledge) and what we might want to do collectively.”

The ensuing dialogue ended up shifting the culture of the school by encouraging authentic appreciations. It turns out the teachers had no problem with recognition if it was deserved but believed that some who had received the award in the past had not been

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A DIFFERENT KIND OF BOOK CLUB

CHOICE AND VOICE FUEL LEARNING IN HAWAII'S TEACHER LEADER ACADEMY

BY SANDY CAMELI

Schools and districts have held book clubs for professional learning for decades. Unfortunately, the scenario often looks like this: An administrator hands out a book and asks the staff to read, discuss, and prepare to act on the latest initiative in education. This is often followed by staff members returning to their classrooms or offices, sticking the title on a shelf, and forgetting about the assignment, as the life of school takes over.

Fast-forward months later, when dust has settled on a collection of professional readings and the purpose has ultimately been forgotten. Topics and titles preselected by an individual or small team limit the impact of such professional learning. This one-size-fits-all format rarely yields beneficial outcomes for leaders, let alone those being led, especially if rationale or relevancy have not been clearly identified.

In the Hawaii Department of Education, educators participating

in Na Kumu Alaka'i Teacher Leader Academy are breaking this mold by engaging in unbook clubs (Cameli, 2013), shared learning experiences that focus on a topic but are not limited to one reading or resource. Similar to open space experiences (Open Space Institute, n.d.) or unconferences (Unconference.net, n.d.), unbook clubs begin with participants posing ideas or suggestions about themes, topics, or goals, then inviting others to join in a conversation.

Participants bring information

The structure of an unbook club provides exposure to multiple sources while also honoring the fluidity of objectives and outcomes.

or knowledge about the agreed-upon topic and share in small or large groups. Resources often come from books or articles, but they also include TED talks, webinars, podcasts, personal musings, and online collections. The structure of an unbook club provides exposure to multiple sources while also honoring the fluidity of objectives and outcomes. A facilitator can help participants maximize the learning experience, but the discussions are meant to be grassroots and flow based on individual and shared goals.

FINDING FOCUS

Teachers from across the state of Hawaii participate in the Teacher Leader Academy. They bring a multitude of backgrounds and experiences to the program, from early childhood through high school teaching, urban and rural communities, and multigenerational experiences, which allow for rich and relevant discussions.

The academy allows teacher leaders to participate in action research, examine their individual growth through reflective writing pieces, and hone collaborative and facilitative skills to lead others. But it is the opportunity to engage in an unbook club that

garners the most enthusiastic feedback.

One example: In September 2017, a group of curriculum coordinators and academic coaches decided to focus on the problem of practice of effective coaching and facilitation strategies. The six participating teacher leaders made a commitment to one another to seek out resources, experiences, and opportunities to bring back to the group on this topic. Before the next convening, they created a Google doc for the team to upload collected resources to share and build on.

SHARING RESOURCES

Six weeks later, the teacher leaders were ready to share resources. They agreed on a structure for the 70 minutes allotted during the convening: opening (five minutes); individual sharing (20 minutes); deeper conversations (30 minutes); and closing/next steps (15 minutes).

During the opening, the group revisited the theme of coaching and facilitation identified during the first session. One participant reviewed the previous session's brainstorming notes and invited members to add updated goals to the shared document.

During individual sharing, each participant took three minutes to share

ABOUT THE NA KUMU ALAKA'I TEACHER LEADER ACADEMY

Educators participating in Na Kumu Alaka'i Teacher Leader Academy attend professional learning sessions aimed at nudging master teachers out of the classroom and into leadership roles to impact peers and school or district-level initiatives.

Coupled with the Teacher Leader Model Standards (NNSTOY, 2017), the Hawaii Department of Education (HIDOE, n.d.) uses its Leadership Competencies (HIBOE, 2015) to provide a strong foundation for innovation, collaboration, and personal and professional growth for all its aspiring and practicing leaders.

Professional learning is designed to promote and endorse educational leadership in Hawaii's public schools and align with the eight competencies identified: achievement focus, instructional and learning leadership, family and community engagement, talent development, reflection and integrity, communication and relationships, change leadership, and resource leadership.

Teacher leaders are invited to leverage their expertise as practitioners to promote learning, improve practice, and help grow capacity within others. Thus, when choice and voice are routinely embedded into professional development, talent is expanded and leadership shared between colleagues.



AHA! TEMPLATE FOR COLLABORATIVE CONVERSATIONS		
(A)wareness	(H)elp?	(A)ct!
<p><i>Summary of new information shared</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Finding Your Voice” — V. von Frank. • Facilitating strategies — differentiating between dialogue and discussion. • Use of sentence stems (i.e. paraphrasing, clarifying, mediational Qs, nonjudgmental, collaborative conversations). • Introduction of trust scales to help build relationships between peers/ teams. 	<p><i>What questions do I have?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we plan for hard conversations? • What models/training exist to support teachers transitioning from classroom to nonclassroom roles to support colleagues/peers? • How do we empower those teachers — who often don’t realize the value of their contributions — with peers who would benefit from a mentor? 	<p><i>Next steps, ideas to pursue</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set timeline for a curriculum coordinator blog. • Revisit unbook club resources and conversations quarterly. • (Teacher X) to invite/host team to school for walk-through visitations in spring.

contributions to pique interest for the forthcoming engaging conversations. Then the group began discussions on the various topics, either as a whole or working in small groups.

Originally seated in six chairs around one large table, the teammates soon broke off into pairs and trios based on their desire to seek understanding through deeper conversations. And, similar to the Law of Two Feet (Bagley, 2014), in which individuals move freely between conversations based on interest and resources provided, the teacher leaders simply regrouped their chairs around the table as conversations naturally ebbed and flowed until the unbook club came to a close.

As participants gained new perspectives and challenged their own thinking, they used the Aha! tool (see above) to capture the experience, record questions, and plan for next steps.

As the designated time waned, the group reconvened for closing and next steps. Using the original shared document as a collection tool, the group highlighted additional resources to pursue as common goals, in addition to their independent work supporting school-level initiatives.

They agreed to continue leading and learning together and identified secondary topics, such having hard

conversations, building capacity within a school, and cultivating leadership opportunities for others, for the next gathering in January 2018.

The team’s concentrated effort not only allowed each coach or coordinator to elevate his or her individual skill set, but the opportunity to share problems of practice for this role group added value to the program as a whole and the K-12 school representatives in attendance. The collective efforts of all participants contributed to building an ongoing library of resources and professional learning scenarios that could be replicated at other schools or learning environments.

And, although the academy cohort formally convened for just one school calendar year, the unbook club structure enabled the 40-plus teacher leaders to continue conversations, reflections, and exchanges into subsequent years, as shared through emails, social media posts, and presentations at local workshops and conferences.

PAYING IT FORWARD

Many Teacher Leader Academy graduates and teacher leaders at the school level are often tasked with using what they learned to motivate peers and pay it forward to the next generation of

learning leaders. In this way, unbook clubs and other models and protocols they obtained through the program are replicated and prove to be invaluable resources beyond the original cohort of participants.

This opportunity to “lead from behind,” by guiding peers through self-selection of professional growth opportunities, is a value-added contribution to participants’ careers and to their schools and districts. Participants have told us that the self-directed learning helps them be more reflective.

The unbook club format is just one example of how learning leaders develop ownership for their professional growth while also honoring relevancy for individual and collective needs. An unbook club may not work in all environments, nor will all participants be eager to embrace the ambiguity of direction for this type of professional development.

However, when given the opportunity to include multiple perspectives and ideas during a dedicated time frame for professional growth, teachers demonstrate increased ownership and are more proactive — something that becomes visible to educators at the school, district, and state levels.

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Learning conversations

Continued from p. 47

deserving. They agreed that excellence at their school could be awarded and should be recognized, but that this might mean not participating every year, reserving it for times it was really warranted.

The final conversation type, MOVE, is useful when all the above strategies have been tried. When a person is still unable or unwilling to make necessary changes, and the behavior impacts the classroom or professional practices in a negative way, the administrator needs to step in and create an exit strategy. Conversations guided by MOVE can help facilitate and ease that difficult process.

When conducted with a supportive, firm message, "This is not working and you need to move on," we have been surprised to observe shifts. When this conversation frames multiple options and communicates the supervisor's intent to move the employee on, the employee starts to move toward options. When an employee realizes that his or her job is in jeopardy, he or she can become motivated enough to change.

Sometimes it is too late to change the trajectory, but in good conscience we know we are sending this person to the next job with a better

understanding of how to make changes and move toward more successful professional practices.

CHOOSE A STARTING PLACE

There is no one perfect conversation. We recommend that coaches and facilitators choose a starting place and then shift the conversations as needed. Finally, the most valuable part of these conversations is the cumulative impact they have on the culture of our schools.

As teachers experience more and more of these productive collaborations, they became proactive and suggest other reflective conversations, and they begin to find ways to use these same reflective practices with their students.

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The first teaching frame was disciplinary communication. When teachers encouraged students to “turn and talk,” or share their thinking with a partner rather than just listening to the teacher, instruction began to change almost immediately.



REBUILD AND REBOOT

CALIFORNIA DISTRICT'S TEACHER-DRIVEN APPROACH
FOCUSES ON EQUITY

BY RUBEN REYES, JOANNE BOOKMYER, SUSAN O'HARA,
DEBI PITA, AND BOB PRITCHARD

What drives many educators is the need to advocate for students for whom our system does not work. We need to find ways to close the equity gap for English learners and kids living in poverty, and that means we need to find ways to improve their access to a high-quality education. As a key strategy for building teachers'

capacity to provide effective instruction, the Robla School District in Sacramento, California, in partnership with UC Davis, is re-envisioning its professional learning support system.

In 2016, the district realized that its professional learning approach was not improving teaching and learning. Like many districts, Robla offered a variety of disconnected professional learning initiatives. There was, for example, an

initiative targeting student performance for English learners and low-income students (the majority of the student population) and another to develop a better teacher evaluation system. Layered on were additional professional learning activities, mostly targeting popular topics or new state initiatives.

This piecemeal strategy was not yielding the results we hoped to see, and so, when we embarked on an effort to improve professional learning, we purposefully began moving toward a more coherent approach. Key factors to that approach are: sharpening our focus on effective instructional practices; redefining the role of leaders; and creating dedicated time, staff, and structures for professional learning.

COMMON LANGUAGE

The first step was realizing that we would need a shared definition of effective teaching to even begin talking about teaching practices. After much deliberation, we chose to adopt the Strategic Observation and Reflection (SOAR) Teaching Frames for literacy and English language arts (O’Hara & Pritchard, 2016), a set of 10 essential instructional practices organized into six frames.

SOAR, which is anchored in the Common Core State Standards and the California Standards for the Teaching Profession, is aligned with the district’s educational objectives. We were able to work directly with the developers (EPF for teaching, 2018) to translate

HOW ROBLA'S PROFESSIONAL LEARNING HAS EVOLVED	
Previous professional learning	Current professional learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planned by district office administrators. Content focus one year at a time. “One-shot” training with no follow-up. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planned by an inclusive group of leaders, including teacher leaders. Long-term focus on transforming instructional practice. Ongoing coaching from professional learning support teachers focused on content from professional learning days.

these teaching frames into instructional practices that relate specifically to teachers’ current work in their classrooms, for example, to activities in the district-adopted English language arts curriculum.

In the Robla School District, we defined coherence as the consistent use of high-impact teaching practices in all classrooms at all grade levels. These teaching practices also need a foundation of high expectations for students as stated in the district vision statement: “Every student reaches their potential in a growth-minded environment rich in challenging practices and reflective learning for all.”

We adopted the teaching frames in stages. The first was disciplinary communication, which focuses on encouraging students to speak and write more. When teachers encouraged students to “turn and talk,” or share their thinking with a partner rather than just listening to the teacher, instruction began to change almost

immediately.

Our long-held assumption that teachers should do most of the talking while students passively listen and soak in knowledge quickly fell away. Teachers came to understand why it is important to involve students in their own learning, and all district schools began to see the potential benefits of working together to create new classroom environments in which there was time for student talk.

We have now progressed to the second frame, disciplinary discussion, which focuses not only on producing language but also the skills required to hold a productive conversation with a peer. This involves listening and building on others’ ideas.

With the introduction of additional teaching frames, we continue to make consistent progress toward the use of high-impact teaching practices that engage students in meaningful discussions with each other. We see evidence of this success in a variety

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of ways, including districtwide improvements in standardized testing.

For example, standardized test scores in language arts showed a 5% gain in students who are meeting grade-level standards across the district. This is important when you compare it to a 1% gain in Sacramento County, where Robla is located, and a 1% gain statewide.

We plan to continue adding frames each year. We are adding a third frame, complex texts, during the 2019-20 school year.

SHIFTING ROLES AND EXPECTATIONS

Simultaneously to introducing SOAR, the district began creating the structure for a professional learning support system. We recognized that to transform our professional learning

approach, we needed new definitions of the roles of leaders in our system and that those leaders needed to create structures and systems of support. The leaders' roles cross administrative levels and include: professional learning support teachers, principals, district leaders, and external partners.

Professional learning support teachers

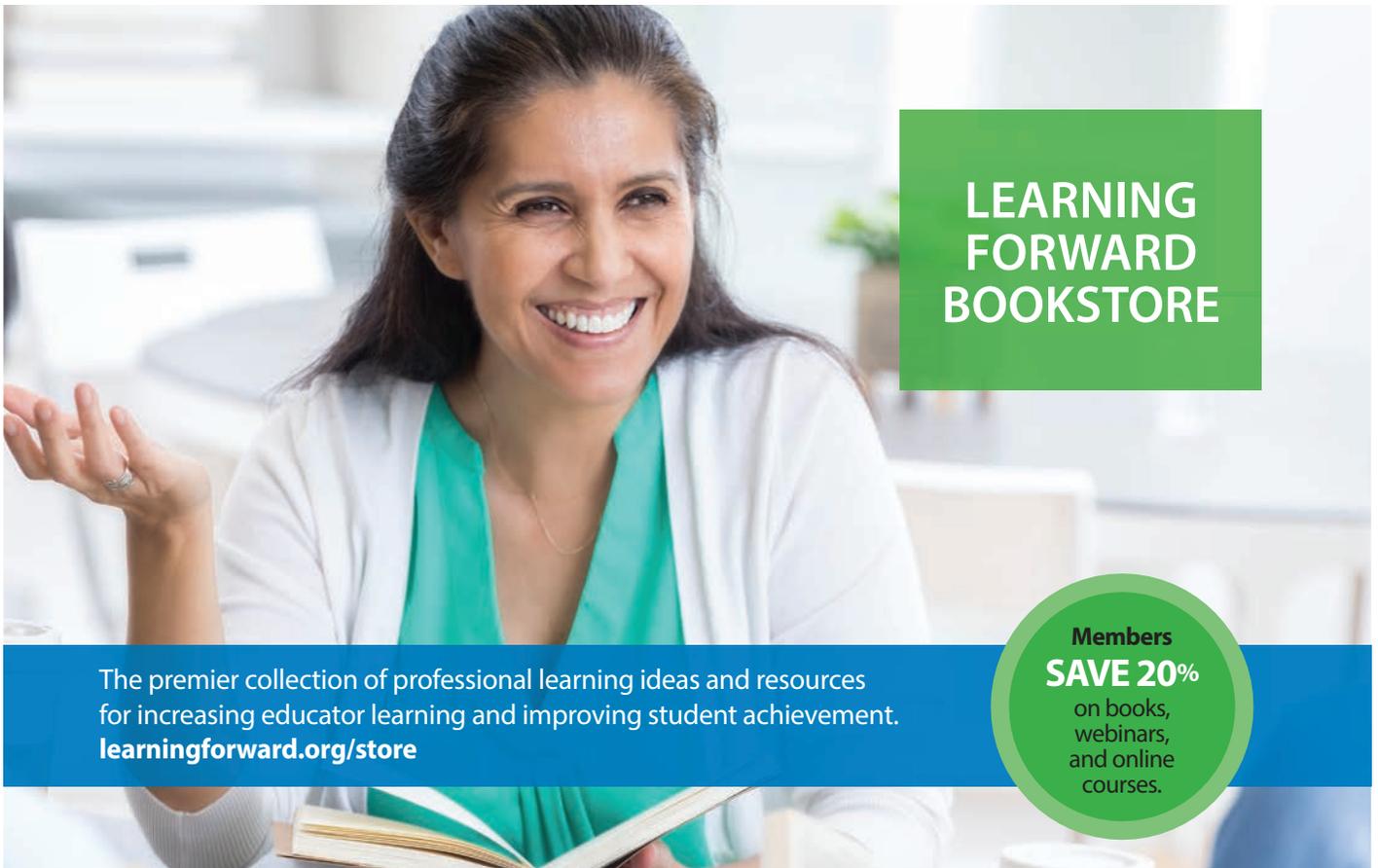
Redefining teachers as leaders with active roles in planning professional learning has created an essential system resource (O'Hara, Bookmyer, Martin, & Newton, 2018). One important strategy for doing so was creating professional learning support teacher positions. The position combines classroom teaching with coaching and other forms of professional learning support.

Professional learning support

teachers work in pairs to provide ongoing support to other teachers on request. On any given day, one member of the pair is teaching in the classroom while the other member is supporting colleagues throughout the school district.

This approach has deepened the interactions between professional learning support teachers and other teachers, while still allowing the professional learning support teachers to grow their own instructional practice. As a result, they are able to share strategies, resources, successes, and missteps from their own teaching, for example, as related to the adopted district curriculum.

Robla School District adopts curriculum according to the cycle set forth by the state of California. Our adopted language arts curriculum is



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Wonders, published by McGraw-Hill. But teachers focus directly on grade-level standards and instructional practices outlined in SOAR to choose parts of the curriculum that are the best fit. We believe this promotes teacher efficacy as well as coherence.

During professional learning support teacher meetings, we saw that the professional learning support teachers could provide unique insights that could help inform the district's next steps for professional learning. Not only were the professional learning support teachers among the most reflective of teachers in the district, they were having daily interactions with teachers at all schools and all grade levels.

Until coming to this realization, a dedicated group of informed administrators planned all district professional learning. Now, Robla involves all teachers in the planning by administering surveys at the end of all learning sessions and through feedback provided during professional learning community (PLC) meetings, and professional learning support teachers provide feedback and insights about the pacing of new learning for teachers and where they need more support.

Involving teachers in planning their own professional learning has added a new level of effectiveness and buy-in from teachers, which is reflected in teacher evaluations and changing classroom practice.

Principals

In the midst of this work, we saw that the role of the principal was critical to any efforts to bring coherence to teaching throughout the district.

The principalship had previously been defined as the role of a manager. If a principal wanted to become involved in instructional matters, it took place during the teacher evaluation process, which occurred every other year for permanent teachers.

If, during a teacher's evaluation year, the principal chose to discuss the finer details of teaching, he or she could

Professional learning support teachers work in pairs to provide ongoing support to other teachers on request. On any given day, one member of the pair is teaching in the classroom while the other member is supporting colleagues throughout the school district.

do so. But if there was no interest, the evaluation documents gave the principal and the teacher a wide variety of topics to discuss that had little to do with the effectiveness of the teacher's instructional practice, such as room environment or adherence to district policies.

Additionally, a principal would observe a teacher once, sometimes twice, during a school year and could provide feedback on behavior management, classroom environment, fidelity to adopted curriculum, and professional behavior. Unfortunately, this approach meant no one needed to focus on the details of actual instruction. There was no requirement and little incentive to stay abreast of any new developments in the field.

However, for a learning community to thrive, principals have to have an active role with teachers and instruction. For Robla, that meant finding a way to change how principals interacted with teachers, each other, and the district. We started with small changes: We encouraged principals to spend more time in classrooms and observe the instruction taking place in their schools.

We also asked principals to attend and sit alongside teachers during professional learning. Initially, principals weren't comfortable being present in these sessions, nor did teachers understand what they were doing there. But, confident this change was necessary, we persisted.

Now, four years later, the role of the principal is slowly transforming. Effective leadership is a regular topic of discussion at administrator meetings, and the work of Michael Fullan (2014) has provided insight to principals in the role they play in supporting teachers' individual growth as effective instructors.

Doing so requires that principals take an active role in learning about effective teaching practices. Principal meetings have evolved into professional learning communities, restructured to minimize operational items that used to consume most of the agenda.

Administrators learned that the details of management work could just as easily be communicated in emails and phone calls. This bought time for more in-depth discussion about instructional practice, as well as time to collectively draw on data from teacher observations as a formative assessment of teaching practice. Today, principals have a much deeper understanding of how they contribute to the district's learning community.

The change in the structure of administrator meetings is serving as a model for school staff meetings. Principals, who have always recognized that they have precious few hours each month with their teachers as a group, have come to realize that those hours could be better spent discussing teaching and learning. They are now finding new ways to communicate about issues such as school parent nights, cafeteria procedures, and field trips.

Principals also learned that if they visited classrooms in teams, they were more likely to get out of their offices and see what teaching looked like at other schools. They hold each other accountable for classroom observation time and can process what they see with their administrative colleagues.

The district role

Shifting Robla's instructional culture required an intentional shift in the culture of the district toward a focus

IDEAS

on educators' learning and growth. This meant developing schedules that allowed teachers to learn together during their professional day, instead of on their own time after school. It also meant tripling the amount of time dedicated to professional learning communities each week and focusing staff meetings on instructional practice rather than operational tasks.

In addition, we added two professional learning days each school year for a total of four, interspersed throughout the school year to allow teachers to practice their new learning in their classroom then come back together as a learning community to check on progress and plan next steps.

PLCs are central. The current system allows grade-level teams at each school to meet for up to 120 minutes each week while students receive enrichment instruction in visual art, physical education, and technology from qualified teachers at their school. Notes from these meetings are shared with each team's principal, which allows the principal to provide feedback and guidance.

Principals and professional learning support teachers can also attend these professional learning community meetings to monitor progress, and they often ask questions that challenge teachers to go deeper in their examination of students' formative assessment data. Such guidance is especially important in situations when all teachers at a grade level are new to the profession or the district.

In addition, districtwide professional learning community meetings now happen three times a year, providing an opportunity for all teachers at a grade level to come together under the guidance of a grade-level facilitator, a high-level teacher leader. Many of these facilitators are professional learning support teachers, but some are grade-level leaders who have stepped forward to provide guidance to their peers.

Further, the facilitators themselves meet regularly as a professional learning

From the beginning of this process, the superintendent's role has been to build inclusive leadership, which guides each step of the process.

community to discuss current practices and set direction for meetings based on what they are hearing from their colleagues.

Making these pieces work required active superintendent support. From the beginning of this process, the superintendent's role has been to build inclusive leadership, which guides each step of the process. This has included articulating a district vision statement that describes a growth-minded environment rich in challenging practices and reflective learning for adults and students.

External partnerships

Through this work, we have come to better appreciate the value of thought partners. Connecting to external resources such as UC Davis has allowed Robla, a small elementary district, to move beyond the notion that limited internal resources were an insurmountable barrier to taking on complex systems change.

Forging a partnership based in collaborative learning has proven mutually beneficial to the district and UC Davis. Further, it has opened the door to connections with other districts engaged in similar work, as well as to financial support (i.e. grants and donors).

MAKING CHANGE STEP BY STEP

Our approach to re-envisioning the district's professional learning support system doesn't come with a set of instructions, and, while it draws heavily on the use of data, it isn't data-driven. Rather, it is teacher-driven and relies on continuously asking ourselves what concrete action we might take next to move the district one step closer toward

a system that ensures effective teaching.

Coherence is the result of aligning the pieces (i.e. effective teaching practices, collective professional learning opportunities, conditions that ensure professional dialogue takes place, and a culture that cultivates local teacher community) in support of our overarching aim: equity for students.

We have created the foundations for a sustainable learning support system that invests in the ongoing professional growth of teachers and administrators. Most importantly, we have learned to rely on our own abilities as reflective practitioners and members of the larger educational learning community.

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DISCUSS. COLLABORATE. FACILITATE.

TOOLS

STRONG, ENGAGING INSTRUCTION MATTERS

TNTP's report, *The Opportunity Myth*, set out to answer the question of why so many young people graduate high school unprepared to meet their college and career goals. After observing nearly 1,000 lessons in five districts, TNTP researchers reported that students were mostly on task and doing what was expected of them but often lacked access to strong, engaging, and grade-appropriate instruction.

One of the key problems was that “too often, we saw teachers making choices that protected — or prevented — students from doing the thinking of the lesson. ... Even when we did see students offered grade-appropriate assignments, their teachers engaged them effectively with that content less than half the time, and students had the chance to do the deep thinking of the lesson just a quarter of the time. ... In other words, in many classrooms where the content had potential, students weren't actually reaping the benefits because they were not doing the hard work themselves.”

This issue's tools offer instructional strategies that shift the thinking load to students.

Source: tntp.org/assets/documents/TNTP_The-Opportunity-Myth_Web.pdf



SHIFT THE THINKING LOAD TO STUDENTS

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES PROMOTE PROBLEM-SOLVING ABILITIES

In 2018, TNTP published *The Opportunity Myth: What Students Can Show Us About How School Is Letting Them Down — and How to Fix It*. The report’s findings were troubling: Students spent more than 500 hours a year on assignments that weren’t rigorous or grade-appropriate and said they were engaged in their classes less than half the time. These patterns were most pronounced for students of color, English learners, those from low-income families, and those with disabilities.

In response, TNTP created the Student Experience Toolkit, a set of resources to help educators, policymakers, and families improve the learning experience for students by focusing on four key areas: grade-appropriate assignments, strong instruction, deep engagement, and high expectations.

Learning Forward worked with TNTP to turn one of those resources

TO LEARN MORE

For more information and resources on all four improvement areas, visit tntp.org/student-experience-toolkit.

into a reflection tool for shifting the cognitive load to students from teachers so that students are actively engaged, use critical thinking, and demonstrate understanding. Coaches, teacher leaders, and other professional learning leaders can use this tool in partnership with teachers to observe, discuss, and reflect on current practices and how to expand them so that students own the thinking in the classroom.

This nonevaluative tool focuses on the following principles and practices that embody them:

- Ask questions and assign tasks that require critical thinking.
- Give all students a chance to do the work.
- Check for understanding frequently and strategically.
- Hold high expectations for student responses and ask targeted follow-up questions.
- Facilitate academic discussion and feedback among students.

There are also two foundational practices included in TNTP’s resource that may not be obvious in a scheduled observation but are essential for this work and worthy of discussion:

- Proactively build academic mindsets with students.
- Set clear behavioral and academic expectations for student participation and work.

SHIFT THE THINKING LOAD TO STUDENTS

INSTRUCTIONS:

This nonevaluative tool can be used by coach-teacher pairs to guide observation and discussion. Alternatively, it can be used by teachers or teacher leaders for self-reflection.

1. Pick one or more of the categories as your focus.
2. Select a time frame for observation and reflection. You may decide to do several observations before discussion, as the practices included here may be observed during some lessons or periods more than others.
3. Reflect on and discuss the strategies that were used effectively and others that could be used more. Note that the strategies described here are examples. You should not expect all of them to be used. Rather, each item should inspire a conversation and ideas for improvement.
4. After reflection and discussion, set specific goals and a plan for implementing changes in practice.
5. Conduct follow-up observations and reflection to continue the learning and progress.

ASK QUESTIONS AND ASSIGN TASKS THAT REQUIRE CRITICAL THINKING.

- Instruction uses the language embedded in grade-level standards to reflect the appropriate level of thinking for target standard(s).
- Lessons that involve a text include text-dependent questions that focus on the most important details or ideas in the text to deepen students' understanding of what they read.
- Activities immerse students in real-world problem-solving and prompt them to explain and justify their thinking.
- Teacher poses more open-ended questions than closed-ended questions.
- After asking a closed-ended question, teacher follows up with open-ended questions (such as "How did you get that answer?" or "Why do you say that?").

EXAMPLES AND EVIDENCE

NOTES

Source: TNTP. (2018). *The student experience toolkit*. Available at tntp.org/student-experience-toolkit.

SHIFT THE THINKING LOAD TO STUDENTS, continued

GIVE ALL STUDENTS A CHANCE TO DO THE WORK.

- Students are expected to take responsibility for answering questions before teacher calls on someone to respond.
- Students have opportunities and necessary materials to answer questions nonverbally, for example, by showing written responses on whiteboards or holding up fingers to represent multiple choice answer options.
- During group work, teacher assigns roles to all students to ensure that all students participate.

EXAMPLES AND EVIDENCE

NOTES

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING FREQUENTLY AND STRATEGICALLY.

- Teacher checks for understanding of each of the key concepts and components to make sure students are on track throughout the class.
- Students have multiple opportunities and ways to demonstrate their understanding of and engagement with the content.
- Strategies to check for understanding are appropriate for their purpose (for example, thumbs up/down is not a reliable check for understanding of content, but it can be effective for showing agreement/disagreement).
- Teacher prompts students to monitor their own understanding and take action when they need support.

EXAMPLES AND EVIDENCE

NOTES

Source: TNTP. (2018). *The student experience toolkit*. Available at tntp.org/student-experience-toolkit.

SHIFT THE THINKING LOAD TO STUDENTS, continued

HOLD HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT RESPONSES AND ASK TARGETED FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS.

- Students are expected to answer questions and cannot decline because they don't know or don't want to answer.
- When students give incomplete or overly simple responses, teacher asks follow-up questions to lead students to a more complete and accurate response.
- When students make an error, teacher asks probing questions to determine the source of their error and help them respond correctly.
- Teacher addresses with the whole class trends in errors or misconceptions that occur in multiple students' work or verbal responses.

EXAMPLES AND EVIDENCE

NOTES

FACILITATE ACADEMIC DISCUSSION AND FEEDBACK AMONG STUDENTS.

- Students have many chances to share their thoughts informally and work with one another in every lesson (such as "turn and talk" or "think-pair-share").
- Students have opportunities to participate in formal discussions or problem-solving protocols with guidance from teacher(s).
- Students discuss and provide feedback on each other's work.

EXAMPLES AND EVIDENCE

NOTES

Source: TNTP. (2018). *The student experience toolkit*. Available at tntp.org/student-experience-toolkit.

SHIFT THE THINKING LOAD TO STUDENTS, continued

SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

FOCUS AREAS FOR THIS REFLECTION:

WHAT'S WORKING:

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH:

ACTION STEPS:

PLAN FOR FOLLOW UP:

Source: TNTP. (2018). *The student experience toolkit*. Available at tntp.org/student-experience-toolkit.

CONNECT. BELONG. SUPPORT.

UPDATES



Members of Gentlemen of Vision, a youth leadership and dropout prevention program in St. Louis, Missouri, perform a step routine at Learning Forward's Annual Conference.



Fred Brown, Learning Forward's chief learning officer, leads the celebration of Learning Forward's 50th anniversary.

50TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

Learning Forward celebrated the 50th anniversary of its Annual Conference last December in St. Louis, Missouri. Conference attendees engaged in five days of learning, soaking up insights from keynote speakers Sonja Santelises, Howard Fuller, Taylor Mali, and Michael Petrilli. They jumped to their feet in appreciation of performances by Gentleman of Vision step team, Willard High School Fast Forward, and Wydown Middle School Jazz Band. They walked in support of the Learning Forward Foundation, congratulated the latest Academy graduates and welcomed a new class, and celebrated Learning Forward's 50th anniversary. Special thanks to the St. Louis Host Committee for its hard work and warm welcome.



Conference participants join the Learning Forward Foundation's annual fundraising event, Net-Walking for Learning.

UPDATES

PAUL FLEMING JOINS LEARNING FORWARD STAFF

Paul Fleming has joined Learning Forward as senior vice president of states and standards. Fleming is part of the internal team launching the revision of the Standards for Professional Learning and provides consulting services on leadership and state-level initiatives.

Fleming is also leading Learning Forward's work in piloting a Title IIA tool kit designed to support states and districts in using federal funds for high-quality instructional materials and aligned professional learning to achieve equitable outcomes.



Paul Fleming

Fleming recently served as assistant commissioner for the Teachers and Leaders Division at the Tennessee Department of Education. In that role, Fleming led the Tennessee Teacher Leader

Network, which consisted of 62 districts; the Tennessee Transformational Leadership Alliance, which fostered nine innovative principal pipeline models with 23 districts across the state; and a three-year microcredential pilot with more than 800 teachers designed to increase personalized professional learning.

Previously, he was a social studies teacher at the middle and high school levels and principal at Hume-Fogg Magnet High School in Nashville, Tennessee. Hume-Fogg has been ranked as one of the top 50 public high schools in the United States since 2006 and was named a National Blue Ribbon School in 2011 by the U.S. Department of Education.

Fleming also served as an adjunct faculty member at Vanderbilt and is a graduate of the Leadership, Policy, and Organization doctoral program at Vanderbilt.



Here are the members of Learning Forward's board of trustees. Back row, from left: Mark Elgart, Ash Vasudeva, Steve Cardwell, Shawn Joseph, and Segun Eubanks. Front row, from left: Wendy Robinson, Leigh Wall, Sue Sarber, and Linda Chen.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES TRANSITIONS AND UPDATES

Five new board members join Learning Forward's board of trustees this year:

- **Linda Chen**, chief academic officer at the New York City Department of Education;
- **Mark Elgart**, president and CEO of Cognia (formerly AdvancED);
- **Segun Eubanks**, professor of practice and director of the Center for Education Innovation and Improvement at the University of Maryland College Park;
- **Sue Sarber**, supervisor of professional learning for Arlington (Virginia) Public Schools; and
- **Ash Vasudeva**, vice president of strategic initiatives at Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

As of the close of the 2019 Annual Conference, Steve Cardwell became the board president. Cardwell is vice president, students at Kwantlen Polytechnic University in Surrey, British Columbia, Canada.

Wendy Robinson, superintendent of Fort Wayne Community Schools in Indiana, is president-elect. Leigh Wall, superintendent of Santa Fe Independent School District in Texas, remains on the board as past president. Shawn Joseph continues his term on the board.

Leaving the board is Alan Ingram, the past president who led Learning Forward through the leadership transition when former Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh retired. Valeria Brown, Sharon Contreras, and Monica Martinez also leave the board with the expiration of their three-year terms.

New podcast series features Learning Forward leaders

Learning Forward has partnered with myPD Unplugged to launch an eight-part “Thought Leader” podcast series. The first episode is a conversation with Valeria Brown, a Learning Forward board member who is professional development manager at Teaching Tolerance and



Valeria Brown

founder of #ClearTheAir, a body of educators who believe that community, learning, and dialogue are essential to personal and professional growth.

In this episode, “Social Justice Teaching 101: Equity, Social Justice, and Implementing Anti-Biased Instruction in the Classroom,” Brown unpacks the implications of social justice teaching in public education.

Other episodes feature Thomas Guskey, Jim Knight, Joellen Killion, Courtlandt Butts, Doug Reeves, Fred Brown, and Tracy Crow. Each episode includes a facilitation guide.

Find the podcasts at **podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/mypd-unplugged/id1345000344**.



Members of the Chicago Host Committee are: (see key below)

1. Gwen Zimmermann,
 2. Barbara Georges,
 3. Chimille Dillard,
 4. Lindsay Kiraly,
 5. Jenni Turner,
 6. Jill Geocaris,
 7. Sarah Mumm,
 8. Lisa Skelly,
 9. Karla McAdam,
 10. Jill Meciej,
 11. Ankhe Bradley,
 12. Lisa Jackson,
 13. Brooke Wozniak, and
 14. Jill Maras.
- Not pictured: Kim Moody and advisor Cathy Berlinger Gustafson.



ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2020 UPDATE

The Chicago Host Committee is preparing for the 2020 Annual Conference, to be held Dec. 5-9 in Chicago, Illinois. Proposal scoring volunteers meet in Glendale Heights, Illinois, during February to score over 700 proposals. From there, Learning Forward’s staff and special guests will build the concurrent session program.

Innovate for Impact is this year’s conference theme. For more information, visit conference.learningforward.org.

FEATURED SOCIAL MEDIA POST

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

Jennifer Lancaster @JenReads101 - Dec 17, 2019
 'Wanting to try this type of coaching in my building. Scary at first, but so powerful!! Accentuate the positive learningforward.org/journal/coachi... Via @LearningForward



Accentuate the positive
 Done right, using video as a coaching tool can motivate teachers to improve their skills.
learningforward.org

ACADEMY APPLICATIONS DUE MARCH 16

The Learning Forward Academy is Learning Forward’s flagship deep learning experience. When you join the Academy, your learning journey is no longer a solo experience. Instead, you will spend 2½ years working with expert coaches and practitioners from around the world as you construct knowledge, improve your practice, create better learning conditions for your colleagues, and improve results for your students. Deadline to apply is March 16. For more information, visit learningforward.org/academy.

UPDATES

CAREER CENTER IMPROVEMENTS

Learning Forward’s Career Center has a new layout that allows users to spend less time searching and more time applying to relevant positions. You can now view job search results and job details on one screen, making searches faster. Check out the new features:

- **Real-time filters:** Same great advanced filters, now with real-time updating;
- **New view:** New Pane View makes job searches faster;
- **Training tour:** Guided walk-through training available on demand;
- **Career matches:** Updated Jobs You May Like section makes relevant jobs easier to find; and
- **Bookmarked jobs:** New star logo allows you to bookmark jobs and apply when you’re ready.

Visit the Career Center at careers.learningforward.org/jobs.



Appropriations bill includes increased support for Title IIA

The 2020 U.S. Congressional appropriations bill passed in December includes a significant increase in funding for Title IIA, the U.S.’s major source of federal funding for professional learning and school leadership development.

The 3.7% increase is the first significant increase in a decade, and the highest percentage increase among any of the major title programs, including Title I.

Though short of the House’s appropriations increase for Title IIA, the \$76 million is a milestone for the field and a vital source of support for improving teaching and learning.

Denise Glyn Borders, Learning Forward’s president and CEO, said, “Our educators need and deserve an increasing level of support in every funding bill.”

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION (Required by 39 USC 3685)

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a. Total number of copies	4,598	4,268
b. Paid and/or requested circulation		
1. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, and counter sales (not mailed)	212	187
2. Paid or requested mail subscriptions (include advertisers proof copies and exchange copies)	3,671	3,590
c. Total paid and/or requested circulation	3,956	3,967
d. Free distribution by mail	400	None
e. Free distribution outside the mail	222	285
f. Total free distribution	622	285
g. Total distribution	4,578	4,217
Percent paid and/or requested circulation	86%	93%
h. Copies not distributed		
1. Office use, leftovers, spoiled	20	21
2. Returns from news agents	None	None
i. Total	4,578	4,217
Percent paid and/or requested circulation	86%	93%

16. Publication of statement of ownership will be printed in the February 2020 issue of this publication.

17. Signature and title of editor, publisher, business manager, or owner. I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on this form may be subject to criminal sanctions (including fines and imprisonment) and/or civil sanctions (including multiple damages and civil penalties).



Members of the Health Sciences Middle and High College science team are, from left, Kim Elliot, Kasey Woollard, Cody O’Connell, Jeff Bonine, Kristin Speck, and Angie Hackman.

Shirley Hord Award winners

Congratulations to Health Sciences Middle and High College in San Diego, California, winner of the Shirley Hord Learning Team Award. The annual award, named for the late Shirley Hord and sponsored by Corwin, honors a school-based team that successfully implements a teacher-led cycle of continuous improvement.

Health Sciences was honored for its work promoting schoolwide literacy, especially through its science professional learning community (PLC). Recognizing that many students were entering the school below grade level in reading and not meeting English language arts standards, school leaders and staff committed to a focus on reading and writing throughout the curriculum, not just in English language arts classes.

The science department took up this challenge and dedicated its PLC efforts to improving strategies for close reading. The team set a SMART goal, observed English language arts teachers and learned from their strategies, conducted book studies, and examined both horizontal and vertical alignment as well as connections between Next Generation Science Standards and English language arts standards.

Health Sciences has seen schoolwide lexile growth of 162 and an increase in English language arts Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium scores.

Nancy Frey, director of academic programming at Health Sciences, said that she is impressed by the science PLC’s ability to model that “we all have collective responsibility for how our students do” and for “the ability to think about the whole child, which is uncommon in secondary schools.”

The award includes funds to support conference attendance for team members, \$2,500 to support collaborative professional learning, and a gift of Corwin books for the school’s library.

REMEMBERING DEBORAH CHILDS-BOWEN

Deborah Childs-Bowen was a decades-long Learning Forward friend and leader. When she died last December, our organization and our field lost a professional learning champion and friend.

Childs-Bowen was elected to the NSDC (now Learning Forward) board of trustees in 2001, serving as president in 2005. In 2010, she received the NSDC Distinguished Service Award.

Over the years, she co-chaired a network to engage regional laboratory members, helped launch the School Team Summer Conference, and served as senior consultant for Learning Forward.

Childs-Bowen began her career as a classroom teacher and then principal. She also worked as director of professional development for Atlanta Public Schools, associate professor and director of the Institute for Teaching and Student Achievement at Samford University, and leader at SERVE, a U.S. Department of Education Regional Educational Research Laboratory network provider. In addition, she served as chair of the board of trustees for Engaging Schools.

In her work, Childs-Bowen brought an equity lens. She was committed to supporting all educators and leaders to serve all students. In 2018, she wrote in *The Learning Professional*, “School leaders set the tone for SEL [social and emotional learning] just as they do with academic expectations. To do that, they must lead not only for SEL but with SEL.” We continue to be inspired by her words.



Deborah Childs-Bowen

STUDENT COUNSEL

For this issue of *The Learning Professional* on student voice, we went straight to the source and asked young people what educators should learn from them and why. Here's some of what they said. Read their articles for more of their insight.

“

Seeing us doesn't necessarily mean only hearing our voices, but observing us and seeing us through our actions as well.”

*Abby Duncan
Cambridge, Massachusetts*

p. 28

“Teachers have a lot of impact on our lives ... and not just the subject they're getting paid to teach.”

*KayLynne McCullick
El Dorado Springs,
Missouri*

p. 41

“I hope teachers understand that our experience in their classes affects us for our whole lives because we associate the subject matter with the class.”

*Kaleigh Biby
El Dorado Springs, Missouri*

p. 39

“YOU CAN'T HAVE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT STUDENT EXPERIENCES WITHOUT STUDENTS AT THE TABLE.”

*Joshua Dantzler
Washington, DC*

p. 3

“We ask educators to remember that students are capable of much more than planning dances and bake sales.”

*Emanuelle Sippy
Lexington, Kentucky*

p. 20

[When students tell teachers how to] help you with learning, then they can change it up and make it better for the students as well as the teachers, which is pretty much the goal.

*Adam Ouassaidi
Cambridge,
Massachusetts*

p. 28

“Teachers, you have a powerful voice. ... If you choose to speak up on behalf of marginalized people ... you're choosing to plant tolerance in this world.”

*Taryn Dipman
El Dorado Springs,
Missouri*

p. 40



“NO STUDENT DESERVES TO ENDURE A TEACHER WHO REMAINS SILENT IN THE FACE OF OPPRESSION!”

*Endiya Griffin
San Diego, California*

p. 36

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>STANDARD: LEARNING DESIGNS</p> <p>IN ACTION</p> <p>We often talk about the benefits of educator professional learning for students, but this issue shows we have a lot to learn from students. Professional learning structures are not typically set up to accommodate student voice, yet youth and adult authors in this issue's pages describe how that can change.</p>	<p>TO CONSIDER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What methods for eliciting student input and insight resonated with you in this issue (for example, student perception surveys, student interviews, implicit bias training)? <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the Putnam Avenue Upper School (p. 28), leaders engage in new initiatives and activities themselves before implementing them with students. How could you try this approach? What would be the benefits for staff and students? <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>STANDARD: IMPLEMENTATION</p> <p>IN ACTION</p> <p>To effect changes in educator practice and student learning, professional learning should have sustained implementation support over time. As with equity, rigor, and other long-term goals, incorporating student voice requires ongoing focus for continuous improvement, rather than an event defined by a predetermined number of hours.</p>	<p>TO CONSIDER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can you ensure you are incorporating student voice into educator learning in a way that goes beyond a "one-and-done" event? <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will you know if your efforts are making a difference? Does incorporating student voice spur you to look at success in additional or different ways? <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

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



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